

THE DEVIL'S TRIANGLE

MARK JUDGE

VS THE NEW

AMERICAN STASI

**MARK
JUDGE**

THE DEVIL'S TRIANGLE

MARK JUDGE

VS THE NEW

AMERICAN STASI

**MARK
JUDGE**

ADVANCE PRAISE FOR THE DEVIL'S TRIANGLE

“I was tempted to compare Mark Judge to Lech Walesa or Vaclav Havel. They were likewise targeted for personal destruction by regimes that perverted their countries’ constitutions, and were desperate to cling to power. But that isn’t entirely apt. Both Walesa and Havel at some point consciously chose to enter political activism, to pick up a stone and challenge Goliath.

Mark Judge never did. He just went to high school, struggled with alcoholism, and wrote a memoir about it. That’s it.

But highly paid professional opposition researchers hired to stop the confirmation of Brett Kavanaugh at any cost came across Judge’s name. They pored over his memoir’s details, and used it as a ‘story bible’ for the attack on Kavanaugh. Then they used every weapon, legal and illegal, in their arsenal to try to force Judge to somehow help them credential their fiction.

He stood firm, which shocked them. The truth prevailed for a change. And after the Dobbs decision, we live in a new and better America. In large part, we have my friend Mark Judge to thank. I hope every American reads this book, and profits from the example of his courage.”

—John Zmirak, author *The Politically Incorrect Guide to Catholicism*

“Few people have been through what Mark Judge has been through and fewer still possess the talent to tell so well what it’s like to be a political target in modern-day America.”

—Dana Loesch, nationally syndicated radio host and bestselling author

THE DEVIL'S TRIANGLE

MARK JUDGE

VS THE NEW

AMERICAN STASI

MARK JUDGE



Published by Bombardier Books

An Imprint of Post Hill Press

ISBN: 978-1-63758-072-1

ISBN (eBook): 978-1-63758-681-5

The Devil's Triangle:

Mark Judge vs the New American Stasi

© 2022 by Mark Judge

All Rights Reserved

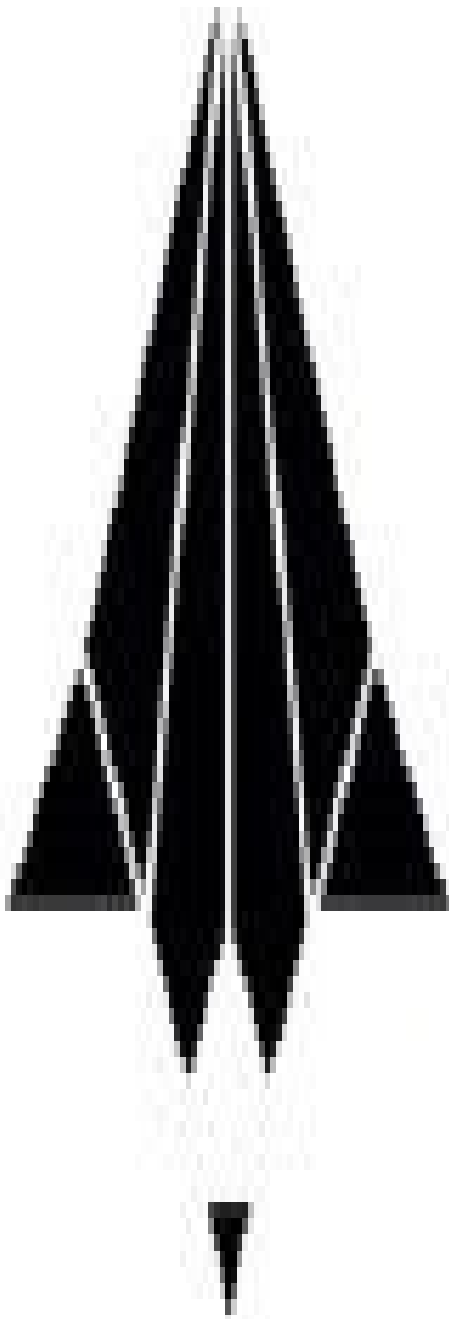
Cover Design by Matt Margolis

Interior Design by Yoni Limor

All scripture quotations are from New Revised Standard Version Bible: Catholic Edition (NRSVCE), copyright © 1989, 1993 National Council of the Churches of Christ in the United States of America. Used by permission. All rights reserved worldwide.

This is a work of nonfiction. All people, locations, events, and situation are portrayed to the best of the author's memory.

No part of this book may be reproduced, stored in a retrieval system, or transmitted by any means without the written permission of the author and publisher.



BOMBARDIER
BOOKS



Post Hill Press

New York • Nashville

posthillpress.com

Published in the United States of America

■

To Mike and Brooke

CONTENTS

■

PREFACE

Meet the American Stasi

PART ONE

Live from New York

PART TWO

Fast Times at Georgetown Prep

PART THREE

The Devil's Triangle

PART FOUR

The '80s on Trial: Apologia for a Decade

PART FIVE

This Can't Happen in America

[Endnotes](#)

[Acknowledgments](#)

[About the Author](#)

PREFACE

■

MEET THE AMERICAN STASI

In August 2021, National Geographic published an article on the release of East Germany's secret police files. Known as the Stasi, this all-powerful police force controlled, terrorized, spied on, and harassed the citizens of Communist East Germany from the end of World War II to the fall of the Berlin Wall in 1989.

The piece, by Emily Schultheis, described how the Stasi Records Archive was being absorbed into the German national archives in Berlin, which would then transfer the files to new locations in Germany's five eastern states. According to National Geographic, "The archive's importance in helping people understand their lives is hard to overstate, says Stefan Trobisch-Lütge, a Berlin-based psychologist who founded a practice to help those suffering from the psychological effects of Stasi surveillance. Post-traumatic stress disorder, anxiety, depression, and an inability to trust are common among those he works with, he says."¹

It turns out that in America today, we have an organization that is analogous to the Stasi. Or rather, we have three informal groups that often work together—the media, opposition ("oppo") researchers, and leftist politicians. Like their East German counterparts, these groups seek to effect political change and exert cultural control by trying to blackmail, terrify, and embarrass their victims. They have often been compared to the Gestapo. But unlike the Nazis, the Stasi worked hand in glove with artists and writers to help spread propaganda and protect the "New Communist Man" from dangerous foreign ideas about freedom and democracy. Similarly, our American Stasi is close to the propagandists in Hollywood and in music, TV, and publishing.

The new American Stasi had been rising since at least the days of the Clinton administration, when the liberal press closed ranks to protect Bill Clinton from a sexual harassment scandal and colluded in attacking his accusers, who turned out to be telling the truth. During the Trump administration, this informal alliance, which included elements of the national security state, went into high gear in an

attempt to obstruct and delegitimize President Donald Trump and his policies.

I myself ran afoul of these shadowy forces in the fall of 2018, when Brett Kavanaugh, a high school friend of mine, became a nominee for the Supreme Court of the United States. They used false stories, rumors, sexual honey traps, and extortion to try to get me to lie about my friend. In order to make me do this, the media, politicians, and oppo-research operatives put an entire decade on trial—the 1980s, when Brett and I were in high school. The yearbook we designed, the movies we watched, an underground newspaper I coedited, the parties we had, the sports we played, and our very identities as white Catholic males were weaponized against us, much the way the German Stasi would consider jokes subversive and art dangerous.

At the tip of the spear was an accusation that Brett had sexually assaulted a woman named Christine Blasey Ford in 1982, when he and I were seventeen and she was fifteen, and that I had been in the room when it happened.

As this book reveals, I was first approached with this news by a reporter, who made the accusation without telling me who was making it or where and when it allegedly occurred.

In the madness that followed, I was living in an America I did not recognize. Georgetown Prep, the Maryland school where Brett and I met and became friends, was vilified by journalists who never bothered to call the school for comment or check the accuracy of their sources. Elderly people I was helping to take care of found reporters at their front doors at all hours. CNN set up a truck at a house their reporters thought was my childhood home, only to discover that they had the wrong address. The Washington Post published a profile of a man who talked about what Brett and I were like in high school, despite the fact that he had never laid eyes on either one of us. The New York Times made mistakes that would have gotten anyone else fired from a high school newspaper. I got threatening phone calls and emails. Photographs and short videos I had made, some featuring beautiful women and models, were held up as proof that I was a dangerous thought criminal.

During the Cold War, a photographer and former East German citizen named Siegfried Wittenburg “captured...scenes of poverty, scarcity, and protest,” leading the government to censor some of his photos. In 1999 Wittenburg had an opportunity to read his Stasi file. He had been extensively spied on, with his

every move and the subversive nature of his work carefully noted.

“I read it like a crime novel,” he told National Geographic.

According to Schultheis, “The six hours he spent with his file that day were filled with mixed emotions. At times, he couldn’t help laughing at the innocuous details in the file, such as the comments of his that were recorded completely out of context, or the time they reported on his English-language correspondence but wrote they were unable to evaluate it due to the language.” However, not all of it was so innocuous.

Reading other entries, “my hair stood on end,” he says. Understanding the sheer scope of the surveillance Wittenburg faced was hard to process: Those reporting on him included a union colleague, his boss, acquaintances at cultural organizations, and, most surprisingly, the partner of his wife’s best friend. Seeing the amount of information collected and the way it was gathered—he found proof the Stasi had searched his apartment—he began to understand how tenuous his situation had been and consider the impact on his family: “Just one more false move, and I would have been in prison.”²

At certain times in the fall of 2018, I was sure the American Stasi would throw me in prison without cause—or worse, that I would wind up dead, probably a suicide from the stress of finding myself unwillingly thrust into a harsh and hostile national media spotlight for weeks on end. Despite the idea, perpetuated by liberal talking heads, that Brett was having a “job interview” and not a criminal trial, he and I had in fact been accused of multiple felonies—including drugging girls and gang rape.

As I recount in the pages that follow, after the ordeal was over and Brett’s background check—his seventh—came back clean, I happened to find myself at a diner sitting next to Paul Ryan, the former Republican Speaker of the House. Ryan recognized me from news photos, and after our bacon and eggs I asked to speak to him outside.

Like someone who had just emerged on the western side of the Berlin Wall in the 1960s, I could not contain my emotions. Standing in the parking lot, knowing

I was probably sounding mad, I told him about the setups, the weird occurrences, the shameful politicians, the violation of my rights, the journalistic disregard for the truth, the pure demonic evil that drove people to attempt a spiritual assassination of me and my friends.

This can't happen in America, I all but pleaded with the Speaker, who nodded sympathetically. It just can't.

Right?

PART ONE

■

LIVE FROM NEW YORK

On September 29, 2018, I was hiding in a dank motel room in Maryland watching Matt Damon yell out my name on Saturday Night Live. It was less than two weeks since my life had blown up.

In the show's cold open, Damon was playing Brett Kavanaugh, a friend of mine from Georgetown Prep, which we had both attended from 1979–1983. Brett had just been nominated by Donald Trump to the Supreme Court. A brilliant student, teacher, and judge, Brett had spent hundreds of hours answering senators' questions, showcasing his life as a happily married father of two, a basketball coach, and an affable neighbor.

Just before the final vote by the Judiciary Committee in the middle of September, a letter was leaked to the media alleging that Brett had been guilty of sexual assault against Christine Blasey Ford. The incident allegedly occurred at a party in 1982 when he was a junior at Georgetown Prep and Ford—then fifteen—was a freshman at nearby Holton-Arms.

The letter also named a second person as being in the room when the assault took place. That person, Ford said, was me.

Ford—who was widely characterized as a reluctant witness—had written the letter herself in early July of 2018 and sent it to Anna Eshoo, the congresswoman who represented her California district, who in turn sent it on to Senator Dianne Feinstein in Washington.

There it apparently remained until September. Perhaps the Democrats thought they wouldn't need to use it. But as the hearings progressed over the summer and Brett appeared on track to be confirmed, the Left's activist base grew increasingly desperate.

Then, just as he was on the brink of being named to the Supreme Court,

someone—we still don't know who—leaked the letter to the press. The story was first broken by Ryan Grim on September 12 in the Intercept, a left-wing website in Washington, DC.³ A story about the letter was then published on September 14 in the New York Times by Nicholas Fandos and Michael S. Schmidt—and it became a nuclear bomb that upended the political, social, and cultural life of the country. According to the Times:

The letter says that Mr. Kavanaugh, then a student at Georgetown Preparatory School in suburban Washington and now President Trump's Supreme Court nominee, had been drinking at a social gathering when he and the male friend took the teenage girl into a bedroom. The door was locked, and she was thrown onto the bed. Mr. Kavanaugh then got on top of the teenager and put a hand over her mouth, as the music was turned up, according to the account.

But the young woman was able to extricate herself and leave the room before anything else occurred, the letter says.⁴

Oddly enough, the first I had heard of the letter was from Ronan Farrow of the New Yorker magazine. Farrow, the son of Woody Allen and Mia Farrow, is the reporter who famously took down Harvey Weinstein, aligning himself closely with the #MeToo phenomenon that had cut a swath through American culture. The movement had already claimed any number of high-profile scalps in politics and media, and it was now looking to add Brett to its list of toxic males brought low by the wrath of their victims.

On Friday night, September 14, I was sitting at home reading *The Claw of the Conciliator*, a book by science fiction author Gene Wolfe, when my cellphone rang. As soon as I heard Farrow's voice, I knew what was happening. That is to say, I knew I had been swept up in a political hit, although I didn't yet know how far the attackers were willing to go.

Farrow sounded excited. Still, he was cagey and revealed very little. He told me that I was named in a letter accusing me and Brett of "sexual misconduct." Horrified, I asked him for details. He said he could not tell me where the alleged

incident had taken place or who was making the charge. When I asked him when the supposed incident occurred, he told me vaguely, “the 1980s.” I told him, truthfully enough, that I had no idea what he was talking about and asked if he could be more specific. He couldn’t.

Right after I hung up with Farrow the phone rang again. It was John McCormack, a reporter for the Weekly Standard. I knew McCormack because I had written for the Standard. Soon after our conversation a story went up on the Standard’s website. The Washington Examiner reports:

Judge spoke to the Weekly Standard Friday afternoon, strongly denying that any such incident ever occurred. “It’s just absolutely nuts. I never saw Brett act that way,” Judge told TWS.

Judge says he first learned he was named in the letter during an interview with the New Yorker. “[Ronan Farrow] said: As you know, you’re named in the letter. And I did not know,” he said.

The Kavanaugh classmate told TWS that the New Yorker did not provide him the name of the woman alleging wrongdoing, a specific date of the alleged incident, or the location where the incident is alleged to have occurred. The woman alleging misconduct has requested that her identity be protected, according to media reports.

After Judge categorically denied ever witnessing an attempted assault by Kavanaugh, I asked him if he could recall any sort of rough-housing with a female student back in high school (an incident that might have been interpreted differently by parties involved). “I can’t. I can recall a lot of rough-housing with guys. It was an all-boys school, we would rough-house with each other,” he said. “I don’t remember any of that stuff going on with girls.”⁵

The Times quoted these comments:

“I never saw anything like what was described,” [Judge] said in an interview after being informed that he was named in the letter.

Further, he said, it did not match Mr. Kavanaugh’s character: “It is not who he is.” He said that the two were around each other constantly in high school, and recalled him as a “brilliant student,” who was very into sports, and was not “into anything crazy or illegal.”

Mr. Judge, an author, filmmaker and journalist who has written for the conservative Daily Caller and the Weekly Standard, said that the students were raised in Catholic homes and taught that the kind of behavior as described in the letter would not be tolerated. “Something like that would stick out,” he said, “which is why I don’t think it would happen.”⁶

The Times piece also referenced a public letter signed by sixty-five female acquaintances of Brett’s stating their unequivocal support and endorsing his character.

“Through the more than 35 years we have known him, Brett has stood out for his friendship, character and integrity,” the women wrote. “In particular, he has always treated women with decency and respect. That was true when he was in high school, and it has remained true to this day.”⁷

Two days later, on September 16, reporter Emma Brown of the Washington Post published a story about Ford and her reluctance to testify since sending the letter to Rep. Eshoo. The piece was mainly focused on the letter Ford had written and

why it was not divulged to the public for two months.⁸ Brown's reporting would later come under scrutiny by the Wall Street Journal and others when her emails to me were leaked to the media (I wasn't the leaker, and to this day I do not know who it was).

Early that morning, Brown had emailed me to ask about the allegation.

Dear Mark,

I have interviewed the woman who has accused Brett Kavanaugh of sexually assaulting her while you were in the room during high school, and we intend to publish a story today about her allegations, including her name. I would like to tell you who she is and what she told me so you have a full and fair chance to respond. Please call me as soon as you can.

I did not respond.

This was not the first time I had heard from Emma Brown. She had previously emailed me in July, right after Brett had been nominated. At the time, Brown had already been in contact with Ford and knew that she was making accusations about me and Brett—something she initially withheld from me.

A few hours later, on September 16, she wrote again with more details.

Mark,

The woman who has accused Judge Kavanaugh of sexual assault in high school while you were in the room went by Christine (Chrissy) Blasey as a high school student at Holton-Arms. Her married name is Christine Ford. We intend to publish a story with her name and her allegation and very much want to speak

with you this morning. We intend to publish early this afternoon.

The allegations she described to me mirror those that have been reported already: on her way to the bathroom, she was pushed into a bedroom by Brett Kavanaugh and Mark Judge, both of whom were very drunk. The two boys laughed as Brett Kavanaugh pinned her down on the bed, groped her and tried to take her clothes off. When she yelled out, he clapped his hand over her mouth and she was terrified. She got away when Mark Judge jumped on them, sending them toppling.

She believes this took place in early summer 1982, at a house party in Montgomery County. In addition to Brett Kavanaugh and Mark Judge, whom she called acquaintances she knew from past socializing, she recalls that her friend Leland (last name then was Ingham, now Keyser) was at the house and a friend of the boys named PJ.

Here are specific questions for you:

Did you know Christine Blasey in high school?

Did you socialize with her in high school?

Do you remember this incident?

Do you perhaps recall this particular evening but have a different recollection of it?

Did you socialize with PJ?

Did you socialize with Leland?

Did Brett or anyone else ask you to keep Brett's name out of your book Wasted?

In that book Wasted, is "Bart O'Kavanaugh" a pseudonym for Brett Kavanaugh?
I see no Bart O'Kavanaugh in the Georgetown Prep alumni directory.

Thanks,

Emma

I didn't respond to this either.

Brown's article restated Ford's allegations as reported in the Times. Supposedly Brett and I, both "stumbling drunk," had "corralled" Ford into a room where Brett locked the door, turned up the music, tried to remove her clothes, and covered her mouth with his hand to prevent her from screaming:

While his friend watched, she said, Kavanaugh pinned her to a bed on her back and groped her over her clothes, grinding his body against hers and clumsily attempting to pull off her one-piece bathing suit and the clothing she wore over it. When she tried to scream, she said, he put his hand over her mouth.

I was described as standing in the corner, cheering and “laughing ‘maniacally’” before suddenly and for no apparent reason jumping on top of the bed, sending the three of us sprawling and giving Ford the opportunity to escape.

Like Brett himself, I was deeply shocked and upset to be named in such a context. Though she described us as “friendly acquaintances” from the Catholic prep school scene, neither Brett nor I had any recollection whatsoever of the party—or of Ford.⁹

The two other people she alleged were at the party submitted statements saying they had no recollection of it either. One of them, Leland Keyser, was friends with Ford in high school and said she—Leland—didn’t even know Brett Kavanaugh.

Over the next two weeks the media went berserk. Our high school years at Georgetown Prep, a staid Catholic high school run by Jesuits, became the focus of a massive media inquest. Reporters dropped everything and pored through our high school yearbooks, calling up our former classmates for quotes and writing stories that portrayed us as out-of-control libertines, binge drinking and assaulting underage women at wild parties.

All of this was in stark contrast to the clean and sober image Brett projected on the national stage. In order to derail his nomination, this straitlaced image had to be exposed as an insincere front that concealed the raging appetites of a remorseless sexual predator capable of doing exactly what Ford accused him of.

Why was I dragged into it? It wasn’t just because Ford named me in the letter. All I had to do was tell the truth—I didn’t remember the episode. And since she didn’t accuse me of assaulting her—and further, no one could corroborate her story—there was no pressing need to investigate my background.

The real reason I was subjected to such extensive media scrutiny was because the opposition needed me to build their suppositious case against Brett. I had been one of Brett’s closest friends and went on to become a journalist with a lengthy record of strong, if unorthodox, conservative views and candid confessional writings. I had written a book about my years at Georgetown Prep and another about my problems with alcohol. My writings, videos, and personal history of addiction and illness were a matter of public record—and were

therefore extensively mined for incriminating details.

In essence the media tried to make me—a recovering alcoholic and cancer survivor who believes in free speech, loves crime novels and beautiful women, and became a serious Christian after a somewhat wild youth—a stand-in for the nominee himself.

Because I am not a total simpleton, I immediately retained a lawyer. Barbara Van Gelder, known as “Biz,” was a very smart and empathetic person, a liberal feminist who had represented a lot of people involved in Washington bullshit. From the first time we met shortly after the Post story ran, Biz believed me when I told her, hand to God, that I just did not remember an incident like the one Ford described.

Biz became a de facto therapist and something of a friend, at one point joking, “Despite everything that was written about you, I couldn’t help it—I wound up liking you.” As hell broke loose in September, Biz advised me to stick to the basics. Call her whenever I needed support. Don’t talk to the media.

This last piece of advice was unnecessary. I had no intention of talking to the media. However, I was more than willing to speak to the Judiciary Committee. I just didn’t want to testify in public. Having seen what was done to other people caught up in such national dramas, I had a horror of being thrust into the media spotlight. And given my history of addiction, illness, and depression, I feared the consequences to my mental and physical health.

What I did want, more than anything, was the opportunity to talk to Ford herself. As I told my attorney, and later the FBI, I was willing and eager to meet her, by myself, face-to-face, anytime, and anywhere. She could bring anyone she wanted—family, friends, attorneys, law enforcement. I had nothing to hide. I simply did not recall what she was alleging.

As my attorney, Biz was in frequent contact with people on Capitol Hill. And after I told her in one of our first meetings that I had nothing to hide and would talk to senators and staff over the phone or in private, just not in public, she picked up the phone and made a call. I don’t know who the call was made to, but I heard her tell the person that I was ready and willing to come to the Hill that very second and talk to them. Then she hung up. “They aren’t ready to talk to you,” she told me. I could only guess that the Democrats had more oppo to

unleash and didn't want me short-circuiting the process by meeting with them too early.

When I needed to write a formal response to the Judiciary Committee, Biz let me dictate it. "It's your statement," she said. "I can't make it for you." I liked this. I'm not perfect but I am an honest person, and I just wanted to be simple and direct. She wrote down what I said: Brett and I had been close friends in high school, but I did not recall this incident or anything remotely like it. Specifically, "I never saw Brett act in the manner Dr. Ford describes."¹⁰

Meanwhile people I cared about were having their lives invaded. Family, friends, old girlfriends, former teachers, even models who had appeared in my amateur videos got calls from the press demanding answers to the question, Who is Mark Judge? One afternoon my friend Chris called to tell me that his elderly mother had just spent an hour talking to a young lady named Kate Kelly, a reporter for the New York Times. Kelly had come to the house when no one else was there and started asking his eighty-eight-year-old mother questions about our relationship in high school.

When none of my close friends or family would talk to reporters, Rebecca Nelson of the Washington Post turned to a man named Mike Sacks. Sacks, the Post noted, "didn't go to Georgetown Prep in Bethesda, the school Kavanaugh and Judge attended. He went to public school. He didn't belong to a country club, just the neighborhood pool."¹¹

In other words, Mike Sacks had never laid eyes on me or Brett Kavanaugh. That didn't stop Jackie Calmes, a journalist for the Los Angeles Times, from treating him as an authoritative source for the story she wanted to write in *Dissent: The Radicalization of the Republican Party and Its Capture of the Court*:

Mike Sacks, who grew up in affluent Potomac, Maryland, four years behind Kavanaugh, milked his memories of Washington's Reagan-era suburbia for his media projects. While this family wasn't rich and he didn't go to a prep school or belong to a country club, Sacks spent time with "this entitled type," as he describes Kavanaugh. "Things had a tendency to happen while you were around them. When they got drunk, all bets were off."¹²

At the time all this was going on, I was staying at my friend Chris' home in Potomac. My life was certainly not perfect, although, like a lot of people with long-term sobriety, I had attained a kind of spiritual serenity. I had stopped drinking in 1990 after several bad blackouts. I still remember my last hangover. I had woken up not knowing where I was and looked out the window. The sun was on the horizon, and I didn't know if it was rising or setting. I had lost track of time and was completely outside what Alcoholics Anonymous calls "the stream of life."¹³

Although Texas Senator Ted Cruz would later describe my life as "a rocky road," including not only struggles with alcoholism but a 2008 cancer diagnosis, I considered myself blessed in many ways.¹⁴ I had dated beautiful and intelligent women, including a brilliant and dazzling lady from India who filled me with joy for four years, and I had published books and written for some of the most prestigious magazines and newspapers in the country. I was loved by close friends and family. I had funny and smart (sober) friends. Although no longer a young athlete, I was still active, skateboarding and bike riding on sunny days in DC.

Still, to protect the people I knew from invasive media ghouls, I left Chris's house to go to a motel—a cheap, dark, and dangerous one like something out of a film noir on the outskirts of DC.

That's when I turned on SNL and saw Matt Damon's impression of Brett answering questions from the Judiciary Committee. I found his performance disgusting. I felt terrible for Brett. But I was even more concerned about surviving this onslaught with my mental health intact. The world was collapsing in on me. My anxiety was off the chart, and suicidal thoughts kept rolling over and over in my mind. After twenty-eight years of sobriety, I didn't want to drink or do drugs. All I could do was smoke cigarettes and chew on Tylenol.

One of the most noted dramatic performances of 2018, Damon's intro wasn't acting but political slapstick, relying on a pantomime of indignant rage from Brett and the repetition of some odd nicknames from high school. Squee, one of our old friends who later became a teacher, quickly became a favorite for comedians. Other guys, equally innocent, also had their names thrown into the mix.

The sketch was plainly intended to make Brett seem angry and unhinged. To that

extent (no surprise) it was nakedly partisan. But there was also a revealing bit in which Brett was asked by a committee member whether he drank beer in high school.

“You mean was I cool?” Damon fired back. “Yeah.”¹⁵

The audience laughed, almost despite themselves. It’s like they knew in their hearts that a witch hunt directed toward kids who drank beer in the 1980s would make the hunters themselves look like fools.

Then Damon got to me—the epitome of the keg-tossing 1980s boys from Georgetown Prep: “My good friend Mark Judge...can’t remember huge chunks of his life but is somehow my key witness!” Then he shotgunned a fake beer and yelled, “LIVE FROM NEW YORK—IT’S SATURDAY NIGHT!”¹⁶ (Later in the show, Adam Driver appeared in a skit playing the young me at a party where there was plentiful beer, cocaine, hot young girls, and nudity.)

Immediately my cell phone rang. It was my Georgetown Prep friend Fletch. I call him Fletch because he reminds me of the title character from the 1985 movie starring Chevy Chase. Chase’s Fletch is a sharp-witted investigative journalist who loves sports and is wickedly funny, with a strong moral core that rebels against injustice. My real-life Fletch is also like that, with a tangy coating of libertarian politics. He loves freedom of expression, hates the media, and despises politicians.

Fletch and I became friends working on extracurriculars like the yearbook and the student newspaper. Together we broadcast the sordid details of our high school social scene in the pages of an underground newspaper, the Unknown Hoya. We also worked on the yearbook together, he as a photographer and me as caption editor. Later he drove me to chemo during my cancer scare, and was a faithful mate in the fall of 2018, when I was targeted in the political attack that overnight became a national obsession.

“Hey, Fletch,” I said into the phone.

“Mark,” he said simply. “I am your friend.”

It was only the third time he had ever called me by my first name. Like a lot of my old high school friends, he usually calls me “Judge” or “Judgie.”

One important thing about a good male friend is that he will challenge you. He will ask you for the truth, and he always gives it. But his loyalty is not unconditional and depends to some extent on your own conduct. A good mate will want what is best for you, and that means having a pure soul and a clean conscience.

I assured him that I had no memory of what I was being accused of and that the indictment of my past writing was a sinister political show trial like something out of *Darkness at Noon*.

“Your party days are going to be exhibit A,” Fletch said. “You have written with total freedom, the kind that isn’t allowed in totalitarian countries. Politicians, the media, and the oppo-research goons have set up a triangulated kill zone. You are in the dead center of it. We’re about to take a hell ride through the 1980s.”

“I know. I also know that Ford is going to be believed no matter what the problems were with her performance.”

Indeed, as I watched the hearing unfold, I noticed a lot that was odd about Ford’s testimony, from the telling lack of detail in her story to the breathy baby voice she affected. But one thing in particular bothered me: no tears. I had wept when I found out I had cancer in 2008. The tears pooled in my eyes and ran down my face, the mucus clogging my nose. I went through half a roll of toilet paper. Ford, reading from a prepared statement and affecting an emotionally overwrought tone meant to convey an impression of unprocessed trauma, had not shed a single tear or stopped to blow her nose.

“Judgie?” Fletch says. “You there?”

“I’m here buddy.”

I reminded Fletch that reporters had latched onto something particularly obnoxious that we had written in our underground newspaper as seventeen-year-old boys almost forty years ago.

There was a pause. Then he deadpanned, “Is it too late to print a retraction?”

After the leak of Ford's letter, the story went nuclear. Her privacy was invaded as unscrupulous lawyers and politicians and journalists brought her to Washington to testify after they allegedly kept information from her—most notably, the fact that Judiciary Chairman Chuck Grassley was willing to interview her in her home state of California.¹⁷

I wished more than anything that I could remember what Ford had described—that I could (as we say in AA) make amends if I had been a part of some terrible experience that had scarred her for life. More than one person told me that Ford's account could be interpreted as me yelling, "Stop!," and breaking up a sexual assault. This, it was suggested, would get me off the hook. But I couldn't say that because I simply had no memory of it.

Indeed, the main thing my depiction as a monster in the media obscured was how genuinely horrified I was by the story Ford had told. I was deeply shocked by the idea that I could have been in any way a part of an occurrence that had terrified another human being, especially a teenaged girl. I too had experienced bullying in my past, and my ADHD often gave me bouts of bad anxiety. I always tried to be protective of those more vulnerable than me, even if I failed much of the time.

In my three decades of sobriety, I had made amends to many people, a number of them women, and it had always resulted in healing and reconciliation. I earnestly wished that Ford had contacted me sometime over the summer so I could have that opportunity. As I have often said in retrospect, I didn't care enough about politics, abortion, the ideological balance of the Supreme Court, or even a lifelong friendship to lie about a sexual assault. If I had seen something, I absolutely would have said something.

If you doubt me, just imagine how much easier my life would have been. I could have blamed it all on Brett, played the good guy who broke up the assault, and retired a liberal hero. But that would not have been the truth.

Meanwhile my cell phone buzzed and buzzed and buzzed. Calls from conservatives trashing Ford as a lefty California dingbat who had been manipulated by the Far Left into giving false testimony. Liberals bombing me with texts and emails calling on me to "be a hero" and expose Brett Kavanaugh

as a rapist. Holy Rollers called to say they were praying for me. Don Lemon wanted to talk to me, NBC wanted to have me on, Tucker Carlson said we could tape an interview. One guy on a fringe radio station argued that the entire thing was a Project MKUltra operation—that Ford was implanted with false memories. Another guy wanted to talk about it as a case of mistaken identity.

Tucker Carlson, however, did ask some important questions in one of his monologues:

Ford says the assault defined her entire life. Apparently, she thought about it every day. It affected her academic performance and all of her personal relationships, yet she says she told not a single other human being about it for fully 30 years.

How can that be? Well, here's an idea. In a Washington Post profile, Ford says that she “came to understand her assault and the significance during a psychotherapy session.” What does that mean exactly? Is Ford's story at least in part a recovered memory?

This is a critical question, because most psychiatrists consider recovered memories, however sincere, as roughly as reliable as dreams. It's worth getting a clear answer, but so far nobody has, because nobody has asked that question. Why is that?

When an adult makes a serious allegation, asking real questions is the only correct response. It's not an attack to ask for follow-ups or probe inconsistencies, it's not victim shaming. In fact, it's patronizing not to.

We don't consider Christine Ford a child. Many of her advocates clearly do and so does the press. Instead of gathering facts about this story, they are busy

moralizing and lecturing the rest of us about how Kavanaugh's very existence proves that an entire class of people is evil.

The real evil is the way that our elites stoke race and gender hatred in order to divide this country. And that is another thing that people of good faith ought to be questioning.¹⁸

Whatever you may think of Tucker Carlson, these are reasonable questions that deserved to be raised and addressed.

One thing that seemed almost funny to me at the time was how the media went after the satirical alternative paper that I ran at Georgetown Prep along with Fletch and one other guy. Reporter Ian Shapira described the puerile, ribald, occasionally serious, and frequently hilarious paper thusly in the Post:

The Unknown Hoya...prided itself on its coverage of the crude.

One issue featured a photo of a student vomiting into a toilet and an article laced with slurs against girls at the nearby Holton-Arms School in Bethesda, Md. The same issue also pitched a new school song that included a joke about rape and paeans to kegs of beer. Another issue reportedly carried photos of a bachelor party the seniors threw for a teacher that featured a stripper.¹⁹

All of this, of course, was highly suspect when viewed through the eyes of modern puritans sifting through my past, looking for evidence that I was a misogynist and serial rapist. As one high school buddy put it to me, "It reads like the indictment at a Soviet show trial."

Overnight, the Hoya was on every TV in the country. Our keg counters, girlfriend quips, and bad-haircut jokes were in the pages of the Washington Post

and the New York Times.

But one obvious question stood out. The Hoya had been out of circulation for thirty years and was never printed in large quantities. How on earth did Ian Shapira get his hands on it—and on such short notice?

I was pretty sure I knew. At my thirtieth high school reunion in 2013, someone in our class who had compiled a few pages of the Hoya distributed a printout. The brainchild of me and Fletch—two guys raised on Mad Magazine, Rolling Stone, and National Lampoon—the sheet, for which we charged a quarter to recoup our printing costs, focused on the boisterous underbelly of Georgetown Prep.

There in the compilation were some of our familiar features: the “Student Profile,” whose job it was to highlight the bawdy or alcoholic side of a particular student; the pictures of guys throwing up at keg parties; the serious interview we did with the teacher who was getting married; the “New Doo Review,” where we rated new haircuts. There was also the popular “Match the Student” puzzle where you had to match a student to his nickname. The running “Keg Count” tallied how many kegs we had drained in our admittedly foolish quest to empty one hundred by the end of the year. Plus the poems by Fletch himself, who wrote a new school song set to “The Battle Hymn of the Republic”:

Mine eyes have seen destruction that the derelicts can do

They’ve wrecked many Stone Ridge houses and the football bleachers too

All of this with one hand in the other hand a brew

The kegs go marching on

As the pages were passed around at the reunion, I noticed one former classmate taking a particular interest in them. Even then I thought there was something slightly sinister about the way this man was combing over the pages. I now believe that three years later, in 2018, this former classmate fed our silly sheet to the media.

It would have been amusing and even kind of flattering if the purpose of the coverage weren't to incriminate Brett, me, and our whole circle of friends as out-of-control drunks and sexual abusers. Years after the fact, our crude adolescent jokes and beer-soaked binges were being used to set up a false narrative about what kind of people we were and what we were capable of.

MSNBC anchor Stephanie Ruhle got the vapors quoting from our yearbook, called the Cupola, a typical high school production filled with pictures of sports teams, descriptions of academic and social clubs, and pages highlighting individual seniors. It also had slang, inside jokes, sexual puns, and other juvenile humor. "This is sick stuff," she pronounced with disgust.²⁰

Avi Selk's September 18 Washington Post article, published two days after Brown's initial piece, trumpets this supposedly incriminating gem in its opening paragraph: "A quote from a playwright runs alongside the family photos on Mark Judge's page in his high school yearbook: 'Certain women should be struck regularly, like gongs.'"²¹ The Post's right-thinking readers are obviously meant to conclude that Mark Judge is a textbook misogynist, a stereotypical toxic male who likes to beat up women. (The quote itself comes from Noël Coward, an openly gay British writer and the author of plays that advocated open marriage and other "modern" sexual arrangements. The line appears in act three of his 1930 play *Private Lives*.)

Yes, it was silly and in questionable taste. But it was hardly what one could call "sick." To the contrary, while not as brazen as the Hoya, the Cupola showed signs of being put together by a bunch of goofballs who loved *Caddyshack*—as well as *The Lord of the Rings* and more serious artistic endeavors.

We ran a photograph of a student golfer, and when the caption "Golfers do it with a stiff shaft" was rejected, we simply changed the words around: "It golfers shaft with stiff do." One of the most notorious pictures we published shows a group of football players, me among them, with a caption that ambiguously described us as "alumni" of a girl who went to a nearby all-girls Catholic school.

Though no one knew it at the time, I had written the caption myself—one of the dumbest things I’ve ever done. Although it was clearly implied, none of us had had sex with the girl in question, who was a well-liked member of our social circle. She was pretty, empathetic, highly intelligent, and quick to laugh. A couple guys had gone on dates with her, including me. I had written the caption as a gag, hinting at something sexual when it was really just a joke about the guys who liked her. But in retrospect it was an awful thing to publish in a student newspaper, and I have long wished more than anything that I could take it back. (Eventually, I did get a chance to apologize.)

Another phrase that got a huge amount of attention was “boofed.” Brett and I had used the phrase on our yearbook pages, but I couldn’t recall what it referred to, other than a vague memory that it had something to do with farting. There was some stuff on our yearbook pages that was thought out or established for years: sports references, trips to the beach, favorite teachers. Other things were more spontaneous, including some that might have happened minutes before we took our senior pictures. “Boofed” was probably one of those. My page also includes the comment, “The Blob Strikes!”²² I have no idea what that means.

The larger point is that it is ridiculous for senators of the United States to be examining a high school yearbook for sexual slang. Patrick Leahy of Vermont actually used a huge blowup of Brett’s yearbook page to parse what everything meant. It was embarrassing, absurd, and downright sinister.

For the record, I’m still proud of both these publications, especially the Hoya, which could be crude but also included some serious stuff and examples of genuine wit. Far from taking ourselves seriously, we went out of our way to underscore the paper’s gonzo status. Our motto, printed right under the gothic masthead, said it all: “Nothing in this Paper is True.” I remember guys reading it in the lunchroom doubled up with laughter. Everyone knew it was a joke.

That’s obviously not how it was portrayed in the national press. Still, it was hard to punch back at the time because I had long since misplaced my own copies of the paper, only eight of which were ever published.

Finally, in 2022, several years after the Kavanaugh battle, I got the full set of issues in the mail from an old high school friend. So it’s now possible to clear a few things up.

To begin with, we did not, as Ian Shapira reported in the Post, have a bachelor party for one of our teachers. In point of fact, we had two bachelor parties.

The first was for our music teacher, whom I'll call Mr. Maud. The second was for our gym teacher, a dude who had a 1980s Tom Selleck mustache, causing him to catch the nickname "Magnum P.E." We also did a straight news story on Mr. Maud's wedding, interviewing him about all the details. In a letter he wrote to us afterwards, he said, "I would like to thank you for the quite tasteful and accurate interview in the Unknown Hoya (which was given against the advice of a few other faculty members), and for the bachelor party, which was more than a little surprising in nature, size, and enthusiasm." He also mentioned his new bride, Teresa, who "has been keeping up with all the details and thought the last issue of the Unknown Hoya was hilarious."

As for the stripper—well, let's just say that to this day there is some debate about whether we hired a stripper or a belly dancer. The world may never know.

The famously cantankerous H.L. Mencken once described himself as a "conservative anarchist." That's what most young people in America used to be. Mencken loved his family, classical music, and beer. Yet he wrote savagely against Christianity as well as the political and cultural scene in America, which he feared was increasingly controlled by illiterate scolds, killjoys, and mountebanks.

Conservative anarchy was likewise the driving force behind the Unknown Hoya. We were Catholic private school boys who loved football, girls, and beer, but we also wanted to mock the authority that was trying to shape us in its image.

When I got my old issues in the mail, I reached out to Fletch to ask him for an official, on-the-record statement. He gave me this: "The Unknown Hoya was an organic and authentic expression of youthful creativity and collective senioritis. It continues to shine in middle age as a reminder that we were in fact more cunning than the powers that tried to suppress us."

All these sordid details—normal enough for their time but today apparently considered deeply shocking—had come out at once, virtually overnight. Less than a day after the Post story ran, the Daily Mail, a British scandal sheet, produced an in-depth story about my friends and me, including stories that we had thrown bachelor parties for teachers at which beer and strippers were present.

The headline was a doozy: “EXCLUSIVE: ‘A school swimming in alcohol’, beach parties, sex, and even a STRIPPER—Inside Brett Kavanaugh’s elite education, by the friend accused of being part of ‘drunken sex attack.’”

The Daily Mail was sourcing its story from two books that I myself had written: *Wasted: Tales of a Gen-X Drunk* and *God and Man at Georgetown Prep: How I Became a Catholic Despite 20 Years of Catholic Schooling*. The first is a memoir about dealing with teenage alcoholism and finally getting help and the second a criticism of the liberalism that Catholic schools like Prep had embraced after the 1960s. *Wasted* in particular had a lot of the three basics of teenage life at the time: sex, beer (we didn’t take drugs), and rock and roll.

“Prep was a school positively swimming in alcohol, and my class partied with gusto -- often right under the noses of our teachers,” wrote Judge in his 2005 book *God and Man at Georgetown Prep*.

“Senior year, my class of eighty decided that by the end of the year we would drink a hundred kegs of beer,” wrote Judge. “I’m sorry to say that we succeeded.”

Kavanaugh is not named in the books and in both the author uses pseudonyms, in the first book even calling Georgetown Prep ‘Loyola’, a reference to St. Ignatius Loyola, the founder of the Jesuit order of Catholic priests who ran the school.

In an earlier book, *Wasted: Tales of a Gen-X Drunk*, published in 1997, he writes of how the boys carefully forged IDs, in some cases obtaining them by fraud at the Maryland Bureau of Motor Vehicles, and were regulars at a bar called O'Rourke's.

He writes: "When we didn't go to O'Rourke's, we took turns having parties. The word would get out that someone's parents were going away, and the other guys would pressure them into "popping," promising to help them keep things under control."²³

The Left had clearly done its homework, probably starting back in July when Brett was first nominated.

In fairness to Prep itself and the other students who attended the school in those years, my account in these memoirs was partial and somewhat misleading. My perspective was a reflection of my relatively unique experience as a member of two different social groups: I loved to hang out with the keg-busting athletes as well as the crazy rock and rollers. I was a baseball, football, and tennis player, but I also snuck out to concerts, smoked some weed, and was a peripheral and not especially gifted member of a little rock band called the Jesuits. ("Keith Moon without the talent," a friend remarked about my drumming skills.) But beyond these hard-partying camps at Prep, there were National Merit Scholars, future Jesuits, brilliant scientists, linguistic geniuses, and talented actors and poets.

I should have been more careful not to paint this diverse student body with such a broad brush. The Prep administration was right to complain in 2018 that the media was providing a warped view of the school. But the damage was done, and the media used my writings to demonize Prep and the whole Catholic school scene of the day in its quest to paint me and Brett as exemplars of toxic white male privilege.

The key figure in this effort was a shady character named Keith Koegler, who apparently was doing research with Ford herself during the summer of 2018. In the weeks between Brett's nomination and the fall hearings, Koegler beavered away at finding anything to sink him. His work is described in the book *The*

Education of Brett Kavanaugh: An Investigation by reporters Robin Pogrebin and Kate Kelly, who covered the hearings for the Times:

A tech industry lawyer, Koegler was a voracious reader and a technical thinker. In his second-floor home office, he'd spent many hours that summer poring over news coverage of the nomination process, biographical information about Kavanaugh, and writings and videos produced by Mark Judge. In combing through YouTube, articles, and social networks, Koegler had learned more about the house parties...and the lexicon of 1980s Georgetown Prep than he had ever thought he would care to know.²⁴

This is hardly unusual. In the last fifty years, opposition research has become a central, if subterranean, foundation of American politics. Both sides do it, but the Left is much better at it than the Right. Opposition researchers spend days and nights hunting through old newspaper clippings, financial files, internet profiles, parking tickets, billing scandals, divorce proceedings, high school yearbooks, overheard arguments—anything to find that one nugget that will sink a political foe.

Oppo researchers are experts at finding information (verified and often just rumors) and feeding it to friendly media outlets weeks or months before it is publicly revealed. That way when it breaks it has maximum impact, and the victims freak out and start babbling to the media, causing the campaign to collapse. This explains how the Daily Mail was ready to run a fully formed profile of me and Georgetown Prep as soon as the Post broke the Ford story.

The father of oppo research is a man named Averell “Ace” Smith, the son of former San Francisco District Attorney Arlo Smith, who grew up in San Francisco. At thirteen, in 1972, he campaigned for George McGovern. In the 1980s Smith served as political director of the Democratic Congressional Campaign Committee, working with bare-knuckle political brawler Rahm Emanuel. Smith started doing oppo in 1988, digging through newspaper morgues, financial records, libraries, any place that could yield the ricin that could sink a political opponent. He has worked with Chicago Mayor Richard Daley, Texas Governor Ann Richards, Senators Barbara Boxer and Dianne

Feinstein, Howard Dean, the Clintons, and most recently, Kamala Harris.

Chris Lehane, a former staffer for both Al Gore and John Kerry, told the New Republic that “Ace is like Bobby DeNiro in *The Untouchables*—he always brings a gun to a knife fight.”²⁵ The San Francisco Chronicle said that “Smith... has honed a reputation as a take-no-prisoners opposition researcher, one so skilled at digging up dirt that he’s earned the nickname ‘Dr. Death.’”²⁶

One person who worked with Smith was Michael Avenatti, who was already well known from his battles with President Trump. Avenatti had been representing Stormy Daniels, a porn actress who in 2018 accused the president of paying her \$130,000 to cover up a sexual encounter. In May 2018, Avenatti charged that Trump’s personal attorney, Michael Cohen, had paid Daniels off and that Cohen had been reimbursed by Russian energy baron Viktor Vekselberg. Memorably dubbed by Fox host Tucker Carlson the “creepy porn lawyer,” he would later be convicted of extortion.²⁷

On September 22, Avenatti sent out a tweet: “All indications are that Dr. Ford is not alone. Buckle up—that includes you Mark Judge. #Basta.”²⁸ He followed up a few minutes later with this: “And to those that have criticized our media strategy: this will be yet another example of why we used it—because it works!”²⁹ Coming just days after the Ford story and given the lawyer’s remarkable ubiquity in left-wing media throughout the hearings, it’s impossible not to at least speculate that there was collusion between Ford, Avenatti, the media, and members of the Democratic Party.

On September 24, Avenatti held a press conference, but its emphasis was not on Brett—it was on me. Avenatti said my name thirteen times in under four minutes, ranting that there needed to be a “detailed” FBI investigation into the behavior of me and Brett in high school and promising to produce a new witness.³⁰

The anonymous accuser Avenatti represented turned out to be a woman named Julie Swetnick, who claimed that she had attended no fewer than ten bacchanalian “house parties” in the Maryland suburbs where Brett and I had participated in or been witness to (her story kept changing) the drugging and gang rape of herself and several other girls.³¹

The charge was so bizarre and over-the-top it was almost comedic. I wasn’t even

upset about it. I knew the accusation was false. I mean, think about it. We were a tight-knit group of Catholic school kids in the Washington suburbs. When there was a fistfight or a quarrel between lovers at a party, it was immediately all over our network of friends and family. The idea that there had been a series of drug-fueled gang rapes and that no one in the Catholic prep school world had said anything about it, including the victims, their friends, their teachers, or their parents, was simply unbelievable.

Needless to say, I had never heard the name Julie Swetnick before. I never knew her or anyone else from Gaithersburg High School, where Swetnick, who is two years older than me and was in college when I was in high school, was a student at the time.

Her story quickly fell apart. A few days later, on September 30, the Associated Press reported that Swetnick had “an extensive history of involvement in legal disputes, including a lawsuit in which an ex-employer accused her of falsifying her college and work history on her job application.”³² Soon after, she did a disastrous interview on NBC. The network almost immediately admitted that there were “credibility issues” with her claims.³³ When a reporter for the Los Angeles Times tried to track down the police report Swetnick claimed she had filed, Swetnick again changed her story, saying the attack had happened in 1980 or 1981.³⁴

But it didn’t matter because the damage had been done. Swetnick’s unsubstantiated claims had been introduced into the media bloodstream.

Ford’s handlers also suppressed her social media and high school past, including her high school yearbook from Holton-Arms. This was unfortunate, as it played into what the Left usually considers archaic and infantilizing stereotypes about women. Liberals seemed to champion the idea that women are helpless victims who have no agency and are unable to talk back to the boys.

There was also a myth forming in the media that Ford was a reluctant witness. In their book *She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story That Helped Ignite a Movement*, New York Times reporters Jodi Kantor and Megan Twohey chart Ford’s movements in the summer of 2018.³⁵ Contrary to what partisan Democrats and their media allies still want us to believe, Ford aggressively courted politicians and the media with her story.

In his book *We've Got People: From Jesse Jackson to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the End of Big Money and the Rise of a Movement*, reporter Ryan Grim from the left-wing website the Intercept notes that Ford took repeated steps to come forward. Ford had already told friends she planned to come out publicly. She was only asking for confidentiality until she and Feinstein spoke.

[Ford's] letter included a request: "As a constituent, I expect that you will maintain this confidential until we have further opportunity to speak." That line would end up being used repeatedly by Feinstein as she claimed that, in fact, Blasey Ford never wanted to come forward, and was only forced out by the media. But that argument ignored that Blasey Ford had already taken repeated steps to come forward, had already told friends she planned to do so, had already come forward to two congressional offices and reached out to the press, and was only asking for confidentiality until she and Feinstein spoke.³⁶

As Ryan Lovelace puts it in his book *Search and Destroy: Inside the Campaign Against Brett Kavanaugh*, "Ford had repeatedly tried to get the Washington Post's attention, hired a lawyer, talked to a senator, and talked to a congresswoman. Yet she was not making the effort to 'come forward,' according to [Washington Post reporter Emma] Brown, and was watching as others told her story 'without her name or her consent.' The only reason anyone had her story to share was because Ford had provided it, yet 'she expected her story to be kept confidential.'" ³⁷

On July 10, frustrated that no one was buying her story, she issued an ultimatum to Brown—call me back or I will go to senators and the New York Times. "By late morning," Kantor and Twohey write, "she was on the phone with Emma Brown, a Post reporter eager to hear her out."³⁸

A day after that conversation, Brown tried to reach me. On July 11 (two months before Ford's letter leaked to the press) Brown sent me this email:

Dear Mark,

I'm a reporter at the Washington Post, and I'm reaching out to see if you have a few minutes to talk with me about Georgetown Prep. I would be grateful for your help understanding what is special about the school, and what Brett Kavanaugh was like as a classmate there. Please give me a call, or let me know how best to reach you.

Thank you!

Emma Brown

No mention of Ford or an alleged assault in this highly disingenuous email. Although Brown obviously knew about the allegations at this time, all of that was still yet to come out. I myself of course had no inkling of it.

Nevertheless, because I am a DC-based journalist and know better than to talk to a Post reporter about anything, including my shoe size, I told Brown that I supported my friend Brett and had nothing else to say.

There was also the matter of Leland Keyser, a person who would become central to the drama and who many people now consider a truth-telling hero.

Although I had not known Ford in high school, I did know her friend Leland Keyser—back when she was known as Leland Ingham. We had gone on a single date. My recollection is that we went to some kind of dance, because I vaguely remember wearing a coat and tie to pick her up. There was some speculation in the press that we met at a country club that a lot of our social circle belonged to.

There was only one problem with that theory—my family didn't belong to Congressional, Columbia, or any of the other country clubs in the area.

Still, I do remember her as being blonde and athletic, very nice and pretty. Our date was innocent and fun—just a typical teenage date with two young people who had no real romantic chemistry. This single evening somehow got spun as some kind of relationship. Pogrebin and Kelly of the New York Times announced, “Mark Judge dated Leland Keyser.”³⁹ Typical sloppy reporting. One date is not dating.

As previously noted, on September 16, 2018, the day Emma Brown reported that Christine Blasey Ford had accused Brett (and me) of sexual assault, Brown emailed me to ask about the allegation. However, the information she asked me to respond to was different from what was published in her article. In her email, Brown referenced Keyser, who had allegedly attended the infamous party where Ford claimed Brett had tried to rape her. Yet strangely, in the article published hours later, there was no mention of this woman.

What happened? At the Wall Street Journal, Kimberley Strassel noticed this. She asked, Why is there no mention of Leland Keyser in the official Post piece? Why didn't Post reporter Emma Brown mention Keyser, who according to Ford was at the party in question?⁴⁰

On September 22—almost a week later—the Post answered. From Fox News:

Ford, the Post acknowledged in an article by reporter Emma Brown on Saturday, had told the paper more than a week ago about Keyser and said “she did not think Keyser would remember the party because nothing remarkable had happened there, as far as Keyser was aware.”

But the Post did not mention Keyser specifically or Ford's preemptive dismissal of her memory in its original recounting of Ford's allegations, a bombshell story that has threatened to upend Kavanaugh's Supreme Court confirmation. The story mentioned only that “Ford named two other teenagers who she said were at the party” and that “[t]hose individuals did not respond to messages on Sunday morning.”⁴¹

As Strassel put it on Twitter, “Wow.” Ford said Leland Keyser wouldn’t remember the party, and Brown just decided to believe her and not mention Keyser at all.⁴²

It’s not hard to see why. Keyser, as it turned out, was a disaster for Ford’s credibility. In 2019, according to their book about the hearings, *The Education of Brett Kavanaugh*, Keyser revealed to Pogrebin and Kelly that she did not believe Ford’s story. Further, Keyser said she felt threatened to change her account. “We spoke multiple times to Keyser, who also said that she didn’t recall that get-together or any others like it,” Pogrebin and Kelly report. “In fact, she challenged Ford’s accuracy. ‘I don’t have any confidence in the story.’”

Kelly and Pogrebin also note that some of Ford’s friends “had grown frustrated with Keyser. Her comments about the alleged Kavanaugh incident had been too limited, some of them felt, and did not help their friend’s case. Surely, given what a close friend Keyser had been, she could say more to substantiate Ford’s testimony and general veracity, even if she could not corroborate Ford’s more specific memories.”⁴³

A group text was formed in which some of Ford’s friends discussed how to get Keyser to bury me and Brett. As Kathleen Parker later wrote in the *Washington Post*, “Ford’s team of friends and advisers apparently saw Keyser as an obstacle to Ford’s narrative and brainstormed ways to get her on board.... Cheryl Amitay, who attended the same girls’ high school as Ford, wrote: ‘Maybe one of you guys who are friends with [Keyser] can have a heart-to-heart.’ And, ‘I don’t care, frankly, how f—ed up her life is.’”⁴⁴

Keyser is a former professional golfer who has undergone surgeries on her back and neck and has also struggled with addiction. Parker reported that Leland “told Kate Kelly and Robin Pogrebin [of the *New York Times*] she was concerned that this history would be used against her if she didn’t come up with a more acceptable recollection of events. When pressed, however, Keyser refused to take the easy route and protect herself.”

Responding to Amitay, a man who had gone to a boys’ school at the same time as Brett and me added, “Perhaps it makes sense to let everyone in the public know what her condition is.” Amitay responded, “Leland is a major stumbling

block.”⁴⁵ “I was told behind the scenes that certain things could be spread about me if I didn’t comply,” Keyser told Pogrebin and Kelly.⁴⁶

This is clearly and unambiguously the language of extortion. As one writer responding to Parker’s piece observed, “Imagine the cozy, subtle efforts by Ms. Ford and her wild-eyed gang to entice Ms. Keyser to ‘rethink her initial statement.’ Imagine the desperate bullying threats by Ms. Ford and her political chums to intimidate Ms. Keyser to change her story even a smidgen to lend credence to Ms. Ford’s bizarre tale. But Ms. Keyser held her ground and refused to join the charade.”⁴⁷

“For her integrity and valor under perceived pressure,” Parker wrote, “[Keyser] has been punished. Even Ford seemed to turn on her old friend, mentioning Keyser’s ‘significant health challenges’ during her testimony, and seeming to suggest that her friend might have diminished capacities: ‘I’m happy that she’s focusing on herself and getting the health treatment that she needs.’ This might have been one of the sweetest condemnations in the history of tossing inconvenient friends under the bus. But, importantly, Ford planted a seed of doubt about Keyser’s credibility, which has been cultivated by [Kelly and Pogrebin]. On CNN’s “Reliable Sources” on Sunday, Kelly pointed to Keyser’s ‘memory issues...because she has a history of substance abuse, which she acknowledges.’”

Parker concluded, “Keyser can stand tall for having remained true to her convictions despite being exposed and pressured by those who seemed to have used her struggles against her.” The journalist added, “In my book, that’s heroic.”⁴⁸

Mine too.

A little more than a month after I first heard from Emma Brown, something weird happened. It was August and I was driving down a rural lane to my place in Virginia when a young woman around eighteen years old literally ran into the road to stop my car. It was late on a Saturday night, and I had been at a ballroom

dance that I used to attend a couple times a month.

I was nearly home when the girl sprinted into the road, frantically waving her arms. She was beautiful—like a blonde Megan Fox. She was also with a guy around her age who hung back behind her furiously texting on his phone.

I slowed to a stop, leaned over, and asked what was wrong.

“We got stranded at a party,” she said. “Can you give us a ride back to Washington, DC?”

Normally I am happy to help stranded teenagers. But in this case I just shook my head, rolled up the window, and drove on. Something about it was off. It was twenty miles back the way I had just come to DC—across state lines. Who in the year 2018 got stranded at a party out in the country twenty miles from home? In a world with smart phones, Ubers, buses, trains, and so on, who got stuck like that and had to be out hitchhiking at night on a dark country road?

Like an unexpected intervention from beyond, I felt a warning—from none other than the late Charles McCarry, author of the Washington thrillers I had read while growing up. Paul Christopher, the protagonist in one of his books, is a spy for the CIA and can sense when something, even something small, is not quite right. He knows that many members of the agency are corrupt; he doesn’t really like Republicans but absolutely detests liberals. In *The Tears of Autumn*, he risks everything to follow a belief about the real killers of JFK, a theory that is remarkably plausible. Here’s what he says about the media in *Second Sight*: “In late twentieth-century Washington...a certain politicized segment of the news media exercised many of the functions belonging to the secret police in totalitarian countries.”⁴⁹

So on that hot night in late August, I pulled away. Two weeks later, my world exploded.

I have since described this episode to friends and contacts in the intelligence community, and they have all respond the same way: I was being set up. In fact, a few of them laughed out loud when I argued that it could have been coincidence: “Get real. They didn’t have anything on you, so they had to create it. It was a honey trap. She would have screamed that you tried something, and her buddy would snap a couple pictures. You would be toast and easy to blackmail.”

It sounds crazy, except that it fits in with what Ford and her friends did to Leyland Keyser. Keyser also mentioned at one point that she felt like she was being followed. I had the same feeling more than once.

As the political hurricane ripped through my world in September, my usual bemusement at our leaders turned into deep loathing. I came to despise the Democrats on the Judiciary Committee. For the rest of my life, I will be able to instantly conjure their hideous, demonic faces.

There was Mazie Hirono of Hawaii, a dingbat who barely has enough brain power to breathe. To steal a line from Woody Allen, Hirono is like the bad substitute teacher who arrives and never leaves.

Then there was the cartoonish Cory Booker of New Jersey. In the early 1990s, while a student at Stanford, Booker wrote about a 1984 New Year's Eve incident, when he was fifteen, in which he groped a female friend's breast after the two of them kissed. "With the 'Top Gun' slogan ringing in my head, I slowly reached for her breast," Booker wrote. "After having my hand pushed away once, I reached my 'mark.'"⁵⁰ According to Booker, that moment changed him and his views on consent. "It was a wake-up call," Booker wrote in a Stanford column. "I will never be the same."⁵¹ Even then he was clearing the way for his political ambitions.

Patrick Leahy, older than God himself and barely coherent, read passages from my book *Wasted* into the congressional record and demanded that I appear to testify. There was also the indefatigable Sheldon Whitehouse of Rhode Island, a ludicrous combination of Sylvester the Cat and Torquemada.

Richard Blumenthal of Connecticut, an oil slick of a man who during his campaign had lied about serving in Vietnam, was the toad who raised a motion to "subpoena Mark Judge" on September 28.⁵² He likely knew full well that if I was dragged into the national spotlight, the media would destroy me, taking days, weeks, even months to report every stupid thing I had ever written, said, or done.

Liberals charged that the elusive Mark Judge was “hiding out,” but I considered my silence to be a wise and temporary strategic retreat.⁵³ They had oppo-researched me the entire summer. I would have been insane not to realize that I was badly outmatched. The best I could do was hold out until Brett was confirmed or the FBI got involved.

I also found myself thinking about Monica Lewinsky. Back in the 1990s, Lewinsky, who was then twenty-two, had an affair with President Clinton, who, when it was revealed, tried to slime and shame her, famously calling her “that woman.” The Democratic oppo-research machine went into overdrive, calling her a nut and a stalker. Lewinsky has since spoken eloquently about what such a public nightmare does to the soul. You become famous overnight, and when things eventually start to blow over, you’re left with the damage.

There was no way around it: I was in the middle of an epochal shitstorm, the kind of political and media vortex that a lot of people don’t escape or that leaves them traumatized for life. The media hounds didn’t care about the truth one way or the other. They had already made up their minds.

Not caring about the truth is a bad look for a journalist. It’s dishonorable. Because if there was one thing I knew, and still know, for certain, it is that Brett is innocent of the charge Christine Blasey Ford laid out. Watching him testify, I didn’t see a judge or Washington careerist. I saw a friend from high school. I know his body language, his intonations, his moods, and how to read them. Brett was livid that he had been falsely accused. His body language could not have been more clear to me.

That didn’t stop the partisan media from trying to spin Brett’s ordeal into something incriminating—as though a man’s natural indignation at being accused of rape on national TV is somehow evidence of guilt.

Meanwhile, in their relentless efforts to ransack my past for evidence of sexual depravity, the better to smear me, Brett, and the entire Catholic-prep-school world, the media dug deep into my extensive record of published writings. After thirty years of cultural and political commentary, written in the freewheeling spirit of the old Rolling Stone magazine, as well as several frankly confessional books, there was plenty to work with.

One theme that quickly emerged was my longstanding preference for traditional

masculine and feminine sex roles. Although to be more accurate, I believed in the Jungian idea, acquired from my reading in high school and after, that men and women have specific natures or energies, one male (animus) and the other female (anima), and that healthy integrated individuals of one sex also have some of the energy and spirit of the other. In other words, a tough, masculine man can also appreciate art and film and poetry, while a woman can be both very feminine and fierce on the athletic field.

This philosophy was apparently too subtle for our contemporary sexual inquisitors. In today's puritanical atmosphere, any defense of masculinity, or indeed human nature itself, as previously conceived for thousands of years is highly suspect. As a writer in the Atlantic opined:

Judge served as a defender of the old-time gender mores, both as lived in the real world and as depicted in entertainment. In a 2013 piece, "Feminism and Body Language: A Double Standard?," he repeatedly condemned rapists, but he also seemed to lay some responsibility on women who dress provocatively. Often, he appeared to sympathize with the "boys will be boys" logic now used by some to imply that even if Ford's story is true, Kavanaugh should still be on the Supreme Court.⁵⁴

USA Today weighed in with further proof of my shockingly retrograde opinions:

In one August 2013 column for the conservative site the Daily Caller, Judge called Barack Obama "the first female president" because he "doesn't have just a streak of the feminine in him; he seems to be a woman, and a feminist one at that, with a streak of man in him."

That same year, in a post on the site Acculturated, Judge wrote about a "double standard" among feminists when it comes to body language.

“Of course there is never any excuse to rape someone. But it’s possible for two seemingly contradictory thoughts to be both equally true. There’s never any excuse to rape, a crime that I think is almost akin to murder because the rapist kills a part of the human soul,” he wrote. “And yet what women wear and their body language also send signals about their sexuality.”⁵⁵

Apparently it is now unacceptable to deal with serious issues like rape in a nuanced way by trying to shed light on their human complexities. Needless to say, my strong condemnation of rape as a form of spiritual murder cut no ice with my inquisitors.

Liberals claimed to be particularly scandalized by my 2015 piece on pulp detective fiction, in which I defended my taste for lurid illustrations of buxom, scantily clad women cozying up to hardboiled men with guns:

Inspired by the pulp paperbacks of postwar America —books with sexy painted covers and written by tough guys like Mickey Spillane, Laurence Block, Donald E. Westlake—Hard Case Crime...reinvigorates the idea that male passion is good and beautiful. In the age where fights are waged by texting and belching gets one sent to sensitivity training, this is no small thing.⁵⁶

The women on these covers are shown in various stages of undress and are usually in some kind of danger. This, I noted in passing, is what social justice warriors call “damseling”—i.e., “making a woman a passive damsel in distress who needs rescuing.”

In reality, I pointed out, it is more often the men in these stories who need rescuing from unbridled female power. There is a long tradition in detective novels and film noir of the predatory woman who is sharper and crazier than any man and lures the (dumb male) protagonist to his doom.

Under the surface, of course, is the elemental drama of male and female sexuality. “[Pulp fiction and film noir] depict men on the edge,” I wrote, “[at a time] when the world is increasingly hostile to dangerous and flamboyant men.”

In the 1950s, writers like Jim Thompson, James M. Cain, and Dashiell Hammett brought readers into the realm of shadow, a dark demimonde located beyond the “carefully manicured lawns, Jell-O [molds], and white picket fences” of “normal” bourgeois life.

“Today’s social justice warriors aren’t comfortable with the [Jungian] shadow,” I argued. “Like the censors of the 1950s, they are forever trying to block, eradicate, change or stamp it out.... Hollywood films, from *American Beauty* to *Foxcatcher*, neuter men who are passionate leaders in fields of the military or sports. Every sitcom dad seems to be an ineffectual schlub. In comparison, the criminals, cops, junkies, hit-men and sex-obsessives found in [pulp detective novels] seem fully alive.” My article praised these human types and defended their portrayal in fiction.

Every man who’s fit to live has his own stories about the time...he ducked the police, got in over his head with money, or abandoned himself in pursuit of love or sex. We’ve all climbed up windowsills, driven all night, and gotten into fights over a girl.

Of course, a man must be able to read a woman’s signals, and it’s a good thing that feminism is teaching young men that no means no and yes means yes. But there’s also that ambiguous middle ground, where the woman seems interested and indicates, whether verbally or not, that the man needs to prove himself to her. And if that man is any kind of man, he’ll allow himself to feel the awesome power, the wonderful beauty, of uncontrollable male passion.⁵⁷

Needless to say, this unfortunate turn of phrase reverberated throughout the liberal media bubble where it was widely characterized as an implicit endorsement of sexual coercion and rape.

Appearing with Ali Velshi on MSNBC, Post reporter Avi Selk remarked, “He’s never used the words, but he’s the type of person that are sometimes referred to disparagingly as men’s rights activists. He writes about his notion of femininity and masculinity, whereas masculinity is like a man being a man, that quote about

unbridled male passion, he's a fan of, you know, movie scenes of guys, you know, violently taking women and doing things to them."⁵⁸

Even as these writers tried to hang me with my own words, they still had to acknowledge my continued disavowal and condemnation of rape and sexual abuse and my strong affirmation of a woman's right to be treated with respect. But none of that mattered since my case for "unbridled male passion"—a longtime staple of romance fiction, whose readers of course are mainly women—was considered out of bounds in today's enlightened culture.

Reporters also made much of some artsy videos I had shot a decade earlier showing scantily clad models reading books in hotel rooms.

On October 1, CNN revealed that I had made some short videos featuring various themes—and sexy women. A reporter dug them up and viewed twenty of them in the interest of shedding light on the question, "Just who exactly is Mark Judge?"⁵⁹

The videos are short vignettes, mostly four or five minutes in length, and include a mix of titles like "My Subconscious (Outtakes)" and also stream-of-consciousness narratives with Judge on-camera in an informal, selfie-like style of shooting, talking about philosophy, religion and other topics....

Some of the videos are provocative in nature: young women lying on a bed in bikinis in "An Autumn Day at Virginia Beach" and another video dedicated to Playboy Magazine in "Book Review: Hugh Hefner Playboy."

"My Subconscious (Outtakes)" begins with what appears to be the silhouette of Judge standing outside, then transitions to video of a rough ocean, a party with couples dancing happily, a church Mass, a Brooks Brothers store, a woman lying in her bra on a bed and another woman lying on a bed covered in political pamphlets that read "Obama's Betrayal of Israel."

A cast of women, almost all fresh-faced and buxom, offer intense stares into the camera and wide smiles depending on the mood of the video. The women portrayed on camera do not speak in the short films that CNN reviewed; instead, music sets the mood.

Another short, “The Girl from Leesburg VA,” features a woman looking at wedding dresses in a shop, then cuts to her slurping down oysters.⁶⁰

It’s hard to see what’s wrong with any of this. And indeed, as it goes on the article makes me out to be some kind of moral and esthetic philosopher.

In another video where Judge addresses the camera directly, he discusses a book that he’s reading, “The Evidential Power of Beauty,” by Thomas Dubay, in a one-sided dialogue with the camera as he walks around Catholic University.

“We’re spiritual creatures, unlike animals, and when we see forms like a flower or great architecture or a pretty face, we can see both its form but also penetrate through to its spiritual core, which is why if we are alive to beauty as Father Dubay says, we will be sort of seized and raptured by something beautiful,” Judge says.

“Beauty is truth, and truth is beauty. That’s why if you go out on a date with someone who is beautiful, and they have no Christian charity and they’re narcissistic and cruel, an ugliness creeps in. So don’t let that happen to you,” he advises at the end.⁶¹

Although I’d always been interested in film and photography, I took to it in earnest around 2008, the year that I was diagnosed with cancer. That kind of life-

or-death experience changes you, powering you up with a massive infusion of fearlessness. As a survivor, you feel free to do anything you want. Almost losing the world paradoxically gives it an exhilarating beauty, making it a place “charged with the grandeur of God,” as the poet Gerard Manley Hopkins wrote.⁶²

In short, I made the films I wanted, and, as someone inspired by the 1980s punk and new wave music that dominated the scene when I was in high school and college, I ignored all professional advice. If I wanted to celebrate a digital book about the Vatican, I’d do it. Combining a gorgeous girl with Scottish miserabilism was a way of dealing with the grief of a lost girlfriend (illness is murder on relationships). I held shots much longer than the pros said I should, shot out of focus on purpose, and saw subconscious connections in things that others saw as just weird.

Simply put, my brush with mortality allowed me to live in the present more fully, and that Buddhist sensibility has informed whatever I write or create. The ocean, light, a woman’s body—they are all in themselves works of art and deserve to be celebrated as such.

Interestingly enough, many of the girls I shot in these short videos went on to be quite successful. I even heard from a few of them during the hearings. “Oh my God, are you OK?” one of them texted me. “They are trying to kill you.” Models, bartenders, family, and working-class dudes were my main supports.

Of course, the modern politicized media didn’t understand or care about any of that. In 2018 I had become a pariah, a crazed, drunken maniac. The opposition researchers had fed them my books, articles and films, and they had done their level best to make me into a monster. Fletch was right—all along I had been making the mistake of thinking and writing as a free man in a free country. Now I was paying the price.

Even Jake Tapper, a liberal CNN analyst, was left to wonder, Why are the Democrats so interested in Mark Judge? He’s not up for anything. He’s not the nominee. Then he answered his own question: Mark Judge is a “horrible character witness.”⁶³ That’s why they want him. My early life of drinking, my love of bawdy humor, my writing that defended “uncontrollable male passion” and celebrated traditional sex roles; this was their version of the “Steele dossier”—the oppo hit job that would bring Brett’s nomination crashing down.

What they did not expect was that I would simply refuse to play along—that is, until the adults at the FBI got involved. Then the entire thing collapsed quickly.

One upstanding citizen interviewed for the Washington Post exposé on me and Brett was Bernie Ward, a former priest who became a popular liberal radio host known as “the Lion of the Left.” In the 1980s, Ward taught sex ed at Georgetown Prep.

“The drinking was unbelievable,” said Ward, who later spent two decades as a radio talk-show host in San Francisco and served six years in federal prison for distributing child pornography. “It was part of the culture. A parent even bought the keg and threw one of the parties for the kids.”

Ward, who taught Judge, Kavanaugh and future Supreme Court justice Neil M. Gorsuch in his religion and sexuality courses, said his students “talked plenty about men and women and taking advantage and respect for each other. They took umbrage when I compared their rooting around with girls to dogs in heat. They’d say they were in love, and I’d say, ‘Wait a minute—then how come you have another girlfriend in two weeks?’ We’d have heated arguments.”⁶⁴

Notice how the part about Ward spending six years in jail for child pornography is slipped in as an aside, no doubt added by an editor at the direction of the Post’s legal counsel.

Before getting to Ward’s own monstrous crimes, it should be noted how much projection he is doing in his quote. We were not “rooting around with girls” like “dogs in heat.” We were teenagers who sometimes had make out sessions. Some of us were sexually active, but many were not. We changed girlfriends a lot, just

like the girls changed boyfriends, because that's what teenagers have always done. Ward scoffs at the idea that we thought we were in love, but that's how you feel when you're sixteen. Falling in love easily is part of being young. Just ask the fair Juliet, who was fourteen when she first laid eyes on Romeo.

Now flash forward to August 2008, and a story in the San Jose Mercury News:

With his sobbing family looking on in a San Francisco courtroom, former KGO radio host Bernie Ward today completed his tumble from one of the Bay Area's most popular liberal voices on the local airwaves to a pariah caught up in the world of online child pornography.

Chief U.S. District Judge Vaughn Walker sentenced Ward to seven years and three months in federal prison, calling the disgraced celebrity a "troubled individual" whose downfall is a "personal tragedy." Ward now must turn himself in to U.S. Marshals by noon Friday to begin his prison term....

The 57-year-old Ward pleaded guilty earlier this year to one count of distributing child pornography, the result of an investigation that was triggered by his online chats with an online dominatrix who turned him in to police when she grew concerned about images he had of young children. The former Roman Catholic priest and father of four went into federal court in San Francisco knowing he would be headed to prison for a minimum of five years under strict federal sentencing guidelines for child porn cases....

...The government's court documents alleged that Ward possessed images of sex acts on children as young as three years old, and revealed his online exchanges with the dominatrix in which he discussed his sexual attraction to children.

"These images depicted these minors suffering the most horrific torment," Steve

Grocki, a Justice Department lawyer who led the Ward prosecution, said to Walker. “He traded in the currency of human suffering.”

Under his plea agreement, Ward admitted sending dozens of porn images via email.⁶⁵

As Father Ward used to say: OK class, let’s recap. In the fall of 2018 Bernie Ward, a man who spent six years in prison for distributing child pornography, decided to bring the sword of righteousness down on me and Brett Kavanaugh because we drank beer and had girlfriends in high school.

Honestly, is there a better distillation of contemporary liberalism than this? As Tucker Carlson says over and over again, whatever liberals are condemning you for, they themselves are actually guilty of.

On September 26, a few days after the 2018 Post article ran, a reporter from the San Francisco Chronicle tried to interview the former priest. Alas, no dice: “Ward, who is back living at his family’s westside home in San Francisco these days, was not available for comment Monday and apparently he isn’t interested in giving any more interviews. ‘I don’t think he wants to do that again,’ his wife told us when reached by phone.”⁶⁶

I was now living in an atmosphere out of Milan Kundera’s *The Joke*, in which even gags came under intense scrutiny by the Marxist state. The punitive Woke and their obsession with itemizing everything wrong with America meant that nobody was ever allowed to crack wise.

It was a very different world from the one my friends and I had grown up in. We had been raised on *The Bad News Bears*, *Mad Magazine*, *National Lampoon*, and *Benny Hill*. One of the most hilarious and politically incorrect films ever made, *The Bad News Bears* came out in 1976, when America was a more freewheeling place, for both better and worse, and was a huge hit. The story of a

rough and crude Little League baseball team in California, *The Bad News Bears* portrays kids realistically. The team of adolescent misfits cuss, use stereotypes, think their alcoholic manager Morris Buttermaker (Walter Matthau) is useless, and get into fights.

In short, they were real kids—and they reminded us of ourselves. That included the girl pitcher Amanda Whurlitzer, brilliantly played by Tatum O’Neal. Amanda fires right back when the boys razz her, and she mows them down with her fastball. She is tough, smart, independent.⁶⁷

Those real 1970s kids became the teenagers of the 1980s. They—we—were often rowdy and rambunctious. Yet at Georgetown Prep we also had brilliant student-athletes, Latin scholars, kindhearted humanists who would become Jesuits, and soft-spoken math geniuses. I was born in 1964, and I was twelve when *Bears* came out and a teenager in the early 1980s. Things were a lot looser back then, if not quite the *Animal House* atmosphere the media portrayed during the hearings. You learned to fend for yourself (not everyone got a trophy) even as you tried to navigate the wave of drugs and alcohol that was suddenly available to minors in those years.

Yes, we were party animals. But so were many of the girls from that time. They could also be warriors—and not the social justice kind. At one point in 1983 there was a toilet papering war between Prep and an all-girls school I’ll call Holy Names. It soon escalated to eggs and firecrackers. Then one morning my buddy Fletch woke up to find that a Washington Metrobus pole, complete with sign, had been uprooted and perfectly replanted in his front yard. Fletch actually admired the leader of their crew, a girl I’ll call Joan.

And while it’s true that as young athletes my friends and I could be cocky, confident, and seemingly secure in our ability to attract girls, we were simultaneously, like all adolescents, awkward, insecure, and self-deprecating. This kind of human complexity no longer makes sense to our modern moral scolds. In their minds, once an abuser, always an abuser—and all men are born abusers.

The difference between this time and that one is simple: we were allowed and expected to be more than one thing. Partiers could be science nerds as well as actors and writers. I could drink beer, chase girls, go to rock shows, and also read enormous piles of books. Yes, we could be wild. Before the liberal hall

monitors (H/T James Wolcott) took over America, it was expected that part of adolescent behavior involved risk and stupidity. Our parents and teachers expected us to drive too fast, be stoned at the wrong time (a wedding), grab an ass or two, and go to Ocean City and disappear for a week (no cell phones, no GPS). Like Tom Cruise in *Risky Business*, another emblematic movie of that time, we shook things up, went out on limbs, and had adventures that we sometimes barely lived to tell about.

It amazed me that so much was made in the press of the ribald and boozy humor of the *Cupola*. In fact, the *Scribe*, the 1982 yearbook from Holton-Arms, which Christine Blasey Ford attended, is actually worse. A story from the RealClearInvestigations website explains:

Ford, whose story suffers from significant gaps in her memory, wasn't exactly a choir girl. In fact, congressional sources say her own yearbooks, among other things, present a potential issue for her and her character, and Republicans are prepared to cite them in questioning her story through the female sex-crimes expert they've hired.

A [GOP] committee staffer told RealClearInvestigations, "We have her yearbooks," which had been mysteriously scrubbed from the Web prior to Ford coming out with her allegations. "She will not make a good witness."

The source, who spoke on the condition of anonymity, noted that the annual class books feature a photo of an underage Ford attending at least one party, alongside a caption boasting of girls passing out from binge drinking. Her yearbooks also openly reference sexually promiscuous behavior by the girls, including targeting boys at Kavanaugh's alma mater, Georgetown Prep, an all-boys school in the affluent Maryland suburbs of Washington, D.C. Ford attended neighboring Holton-Arms School, an all-girls academy.⁶⁸

The *Scribe* repeatedly glorifies liquor. It has pictures of girls drinking heavily

and “beer cans stacked up,” along with one caption that references the “boys, beer and... ‘Zoo’ atmosphere” of the time and another that “mocks the faculty and parents”: “Come on, you’re really too young to drink.”⁶⁹

The party culture of the era is openly celebrated: “One cannot fail to mention the climax of the junior social scene, the party. Striving to extend our educational experience beyond the confines of the classroom, we played such intellectually stimulating games as Quarters, Mexican Dice and everyone’s favorite, Pass-Out, which usually resulted from the aforementioned two.”⁷⁰

Also this: “There were always parties to celebrate any occasion. Although these parties are no doubt unforgettable, they are only a memory lapse for most, since loss of consciousness is often an integral part of the party scene.”⁷¹

Nor did the yearbook’s female editors hesitate to portray themselves and their classmates as uninhibited predators: “Other seniors preferred to expand their horizons and date younger men, usually sophomores, who could bring the vitality and freshness of innocence to a relationship.”⁷²

There is also the inevitable paean to beach week, a 1980s prep school ritual that was held up during the hearings as proof that the Maryland Catholic school scene was an endless bacchanal of boozing and sex. This distorted notion was all too easy to believe for those raised on the notion that kids who went to same-sex Catholic schools were sexually repressed, just aching to break out of their moralistic straitjackets.

In 1984, the year Ford graduated, the yearbook offers this: “Beach week culminated the year for those of us lucky enough to go. With school and our minds in temporary recess, we were able to release all those troubling inhibitions of the past year. While dancing in the middle of coastal Highway, Ann...and friends picked up some men who passed out in their apartment.”⁷³

When people brought up the Holton yearbook, I actually found myself defending Ford. I was being bombarded with stories, many from people I didn’t even know, about Ford’s partying ways in the 1980s at Holton. She was promiscuous, people who knew her in high school called to tell me. She could put dudes under the table playing drinking games. She was a wild child.

To which I said, So what? These kinds of rumors didn’t have any bearing on whether she deserved to be sexually assaulted at a party. Ford’s partying in high

school had no more relation to her supposed assault than our carousing made us rapists.

And there's the rub. Had the Left not tried to whitewash Ford's past and present her as another Shirley Temple, her story would have been much more believable. Just as most fair-minded people could believe that, as 1970s kids who became teens in the hard-partying 1980s, we threw a few parties and that this did not make us rapists, they could believe that a socially active girl like Ford could have, at some time or place, been the victim of an assault, even if it was not at the hands of Brett Kavanaugh. Most Americans can hold two thoughts in their heads at the same time.

A couple of years ago, Joan, the fearless girl who won the toilet paper war, passed away. When Fletch heard the news, a look of admiration crossed his face for those take-no-prisoners girls, the "bad news bears" we knew and feared. "Damn," he said in a tone of quiet respect, "that Joan threw a mean punch."

Of all the media reporting in 2018, only one writer on the left made even a glancing effort to admit we weren't monsters. The piece appeared, believe it or not, in the *Nation*, a venerable socialist publication where I had once worked as an intern before I became a conservative.

Timothy Don was a year younger than us at Georgetown Prep and lived near me. We carpooled together before he left the school in 1982 due to a family move. In the *Nation* in October 2018, Don wrote that Brett and I "were both popular boys, and I remember them each with that mixture of fear and fondness that only a 14-year-old boy can feel toward well-liked upperclassmen."⁷⁴ Then this: "There is no question in my mind that Christine Blasey Ford is telling the truth."

Don based this belief on how he remembers me:

[Judge] would be described in today's therapy-laden culture as someone who

“self-medicated” with alcohol. He watched The Benny Hill Show every night and tuned the radio dial every morning to whatever station was playing The Who. “Baba O’Riley” was a favorite. At pep rallies in the school gym before football games he’d come charging in and unabashedly make a fool of himself to get the howling and the cheers started. Maybe that sounds like just more prep-school grotesquerie, but it was also, for a 14-year-old, profoundly liberating. To be someone who didn’t give a damn. Someone who was confident enough to make a buffoon of himself in front of his peers. We’d be shoulder to shoulder in a group and he would rush up and literally throw himself into our midst, giggling and yelling, tackling someone and rolling off into the grass.

Don adds that “many of the boys at Prep—including me—were actually quite fond of him.”

He then goes on to describe a Prep football game where we were playing a team from a school of mostly African American students. There was a lot of racial tension on the field, and after the game (which we won), one of them called Don over and then punched him in the gut. “Mark Judge was at the car and he saw the whole thing happen,” Don wrote. “He looked at me and said, ‘Holy shit man, are you OK?’ And he kind of put his arm around me (very unusual that, in an all-boys prep school, something that would get you called a ‘faggot’ in the 1980s), and he took my bag and threw it into the trunk.”

He continues:

I didn’t say much more than, “Yeah, I’m OK.” There wasn’t really anything more to say. On the way home we stopped and he bought some beer at a 7-11 with his fake ID and we opened the car windows and drank it while listening to The Who. We didn’t say much or talk about the incident. I just wanted to forget it. I didn’t tell anyone about it, not even my parents, mostly because I was so weirded out by the whole thing and even more because I felt like I deserved it. Who was I, who were we? Privileged, white, prep-school boys. We had the money, the cars, the country clubs, the green fields, the happy homes. We had all of it, and we deserved a collective punch in the stomach.

The next week, Don got “called out of Latin class and into the dean of students’ office.” The dean, recalls Don, “sat me down and very carefully and tenderly asked what had happened after the football game the previous Friday. I told him, we talked, and he led me through the confusion in a discussion of forgiveness and pain and injustice. It turns out that Judge had told him what he had seen, not to rat the other kid out, but simply because even Judge, this teenage drunk-ass idiot who would grow up to become a shitty writer with some very bad ideas indeed, had a soul. Had a humanity. Thought that someone needed some help.”

Don also recalls spending a few days with Brett at a friend’s beach house: “There were no parties or girls. There was no beer. In the mornings we rode bikes and ate jelly donuts and played basketball for hours—Brett was good—and then went inside and drank pitchers of iced water over Monopoly games that lasted into the evening. It was harmless. Innocent.”

Don’s conclusion is worth quoting at length:

Who knows the truth, and who can tell it? Christine notes Mark’s ambivalence on that night in 1982. Did he jump on the bed to join in the assault? Did he do so simply out of the wild teenage exuberance that was characteristic of him, with no clear motivation of any kind? Only Mark could say.

But I knew Mark, a little bit and for only a short time, and I’d like to think that a boy who began to participate in a sexual assault stepped back from the brink, even if for reasons of which he was only dimly aware. I believe that Mark Judge, even in his stupid, drunken state, recognized that something was going on that shouldn’t be going on. That he had a kind of person-to-person awareness of the claims of the other that was lacking in Christine’s assailant. That after having done many wrong things, Mark did one right thing. That he may have prevented the rape of a 15-year-old girl in 1982.

I’d like to think that that boy who comforted me, drove me home, and bought me a beer after I got punched in the gut one afternoon might be able to do another right thing, right now, and reach into his memory, sweep the intervening years

away, and tell us the truth about what happened that night.⁷⁵

Yes, Don's liberal self-flagellation is ridiculous. (Punch me! I'm white and I live in the suburbs!) Still, he does try to portray us as real people with a few redeeming qualities. It's just unfortunate that he leaps from Monopoly games to gang rapes without so much as blinking an eye. Don may have left Georgetown Prep before taking the class on critical thinking.

Beginning in the Trump years and afterwards, the once-independent American press has repeatedly been described as “Soviet”—thoroughly politicized and totally in thrall to the Democratic Party and its partisan narrative. Many commentators on the right have begun using the term “Stasi tactics” to describe the armed arrest and prosecution of the Democrats’ political enemies, culminating in the recent FBI search of Trump’s Mar-a-Lago estate on a hunt for classified documents and the subsequent seizure of cell phones belonging to his associates in a supposed plot to overthrow the government.

According to Wikipedia, “The Ministry for State Security...commonly known as the Stasi...has been described as one of the most effective and repressive intelligence and secret police agencies to have ever existed.”⁷⁶ These all-powerful secret police controlled and terrorized the country until the fall of the Berlin Wall.

The Stasi is unfamiliar to most Americans and can only be learned about today in film and literature, like Arthur Koestler’s novel *Darkness at Noon*. But it is also the subject of one of the greatest films ever made, *The Lives of Others* (2006). It dramatizes the relentless, efficient cruelty of the Stasi, who were willing to use spying, intimidation, outright violence, and other forms of coercion to destroy anyone who stood in the way of creating the “New Communist Man.” As the film depicts, even the smallest deviation from the official party line—a joke, a remark that depriving someone of sleep is “inhumane”—was noted by the Stasi as suspect.

The Stasi are often compared to Hitler's Gestapo, but even many Germans said that the Stasi were worse—because they were far more insidious. While Hitler and Stalin sought to crush writers and other artists because they feared the freedom they represented, the Stasi saw writers and artists as useful allies. And indeed, in Communist East Germany artists and writers willingly worked to promote the lies of the state—just like America in the age of woke media, where journalists, comedians, entertainers, and other liberal elites openly conspired to destroy Brett Kavanaugh—and gladly fed me to the woodchipper along with him.

In *A State of Secrecy: Stasi Informers and the Culture of Surveillance*, Alison Lewis, an Australian academic who specializes in Stasi history, notes:

From its inception to its dissolution, the Ministry for State Security recruited an alarmingly high proportion of writers as informants. It recruited sources from deep inside official circles, such as the consecrated spheres of the German Writers' Guild (Deutscher Schriftstellerverband), as well as from the fringes of society. The Stasi touched the life of virtually every writer in the country. Writers, whether of poetry, novels, drama, essays, radio, television, or film scripts, belonged to the intelligentsia....

The East German regime realized that, because writers wielded so much public authority, they had to be politically organized and controlled.⁷⁷

To any unbiased observer, in recent years the American Left has lowered a totalitarian curtain of fear on the American arts. It's a barricade that prevents Western artists, musicians, and comedians from performing certain songs, writing certain plays, or telling certain jokes. Social media has become its own surveillance state. Movies and books are scrapped for offenses against the Woke State before they are even conceived. The authorities presiding over this crushing of the spirit are often themselves artists, producers and writers.

To the new Stasi, Brett and I, two privileged white guys who had gone to prep school at the Catholic equivalent of Ridgmont High, were the locus of evil.

As the maelstrom swirled around me, I began to have doubts that I would make it out with my sanity intact—or even alive. I had gotten sober in 1990 and successfully battled cancer, but the new American Stasi might be the thing that did me in. I was under tremendous pressure of a kind I'd never known before, held up to national scrutiny in a way that very few of us could handle. How long would this go on? How long could I stand up to it?

I took to listening to favorite bands from my youth—New Order, the Pet Shop Boys, Prince, R.E.M., Michael Jackson, U2. I also wanted to go out defiant. They were going to have to kill me, and the last thing I would say would be an echo of John Lydon from Public Image Ltd: Now FUCK OFF!!!

There would of course be the temptation to drink. For a recovering alcoholic with twenty-eight years of sobriety, this was about the scariest thing you could imagine. I was starting to feel out of my depth, like I had swum out too far and couldn't feel the sand beneath my feet. There were moments in my past when I had felt this way—over my head in a morass of health issues, addiction issues, financial issues. At times like this, when you feel the water closing over your head, it might just seem as though the best thing you can do is to let yourself drown.

Worse than any of that, I feared I might be visited by the demon who had found me more than thirty years ago.

In 1988, when I was still in college, I woke up in the middle of the night and saw a demon. I had been drinking for several days in a row and should have been unconscious, but at the stroke of three I sat straight up in bed. I was in a small room in a basement apartment in Washington, DC. There was something in the room with me.

The shadow moved closer and closer until we were face to face. Its body was animalistic, like a panther, but the face was pure malice. I slapped myself several times to try and wake up. Then I realized I was awake. I looked into its yellow eyes and was frozen with fear. For the first time in years, I closed my eyes and

said a prayer.

The next thing I knew it was morning.

I stopped drinking shortly after. I never forgot the experience.

One of my old teachers at Georgetown Prep, Father John Nicola, was an actual exorcist who had been a consultant for the famous film *The Exorcist*. William Peter Blatty—a friend of my dad’s—based his 1971 book on a reported case of demonic possession that had occurred in Maryland in the 1940s. In the book, a hip actress and single mother, Chris MacNeil, is shooting a film in Washington when her daughter Regan begins to exhibit strange behavior. When her bed-wetting and absent-mindedness turn out to be full-blown demonic possession, MacNeil consults Father Karras. At the time, Karras is having a crisis of faith. By the end of the film, when Karras has seen evil up close, he no longer has doubts. The young priest explodes in rage at the demon, sacrificing himself to save Regan.⁷⁸ Amidst the drugs, scandals, crime, and general moral collapse of the 1970s, *The Exorcist* announced that there are some evils that are timeless and don’t change.

Would I survive another such encounter? Was I at risk of suicide? There were moments during this ordeal when I felt that certain people wanted me to die.

Suicides were common among victims of the Stasi. They are also frequent among the targets of media shaming campaigns. In her 2019 article “Shame Storm,” journalist Helen Andrews explored how many of those victimized by liberal rage mobs end their own lives:

At least half a dozen cases mentioned in *Laws of Image: Privacy and Publicity in America*, Samantha Barbas’s 2015 history of shame and libel, end with suicides. Jon Ronson’s *So You’ve Been Publicly Shamed* describes an English chef, living in France, who killed himself after his wife-swapping hobby was revealed by the *News of the World*. It also tells of a rural Welsh preacher who found himself the subject of a photo spread in the same publication for hosting an orgy in his caravan—after which he, too, killed himself.⁷⁹

As September 24—my birthday—approached, I feared that if I stayed in DC I might do myself harm. The negative and dark demonic force surrounding the scandal was just too strong. So on the advice of my lawyer, I decided to drive down to Bethany Beach for a couple days.

The Eastern Shore, a series of beach resort towns in Delaware and Maryland, was a beautiful, peaceful part of the country, as well as a place where I had happy memories as a kid—many involving good times with Brett.

I loved the ocean with its calming effect on the psyche. Much worse was yet to come. But I already knew that I had been set up and that reporters would be hounding me until I confirmed the bullshit the oppo researchers had come up with.

Needing a place to stay, I turned to my old buddy Rick. I've known Rick since we were kids. Our parents were close friends and our families lived just a couple of miles apart in the same Maryland suburb. Rick was into vintage cars, Van Halen, swim club, and girls. He eventually became a bartender, work that he loves and is very good at.

Rick is a working-class guy with a salty mouth who is street-smart and very funny. A graduate of an all-boys military high school, an experience that he says cemented his habits for life, he calls himself Sergeant Hulka after the drill instructor in the Bill Murray classic *Stripes*. Rick owns a vintage Corvette and vintage Camaro, cars he drives to a vintage-car show every year on the Shore, where his mom owns a house a couple of blocks off the water.

A few years earlier, my mother and Rick's had both begun needing elderly care. My mother went into a memory care facility near where Rick's mother lived. Rick had proposed that I move in with his mom; that way I could help him take care of her and be close enough to watch out for my own mother.

Rick and I became like brothers. He would appear in my room after he got off work and jokingly announce a LOCKERBOX INSPECTION because I'm sloppy and absent-minded and Sergeant Hulka was there to GET THIS PLACE IN ORDER.⁸⁰ We would laugh about our old close brushes with the law (speeding on minibikes, firecrackers, and so on) and talk for hours about the dutiful process of ushering our mothers through their final years. We came to rely on each other emotionally and spiritually. We knew that our mothers were

dying and that we had to see them through it.

Much to my dismay, Rick got drawn into the mess along with me. After Kate Kelly talked her way into his mother's house, Rick was livid. Soon reporters were also blowing up his phone. His encounters with reporters usually went like this.

"Hi Rick, this is Andrew Sleazoid from the Washington Post."

"Fuck off."

"I understand you have known Mark Judge your entire life."

"I got nothin' to say to you."

"If you just let me help you understand why you should—"

"Fuck off."

Click.

Then a reporter from the Post made the mistake of showing up at Rick's rural Virginia house where he lives with his wife and dogs.

Rick was bartending at the time, but a neighbor tipped him off that some loser with a notebook and a ponytail was snooping around. Rick told the neighbor to feel free to arm himself and advise the reporter to, well, fuck off and mind his own business.

Rick's phone rang. It was the Post reporter. "I just have two things to say to you," Rick said. "Everybody on my street hates the media, and everybody on my street owns a gun."

At that point the reporter saw the neighbor approaching him. Being a member of the media, he had probably never seen a genuine firearm, and he hastily beat a retreat.

Now I went to the bar where Rick works and told him I was going to drive down to the beach for a couple days to escape the politicians and the media. I could go a motel. Rick reached into his pocket and produced a key to his mother's beach

house. I couldn't believe his generosity.

I drove three hours to the beach and had just arrived when I got the message on my phone.

A reptilian male voice said, "Hey Mark, you like fucking with people? I like fucking with people too. Give me a call. We'll work something out."

The voice was both menacing and weirdly solicitous, like the wheedling voice of a demon. He didn't leave a name, but the number, from California, was on my caller ID.

This was not some outside nut randomly calling me, wanting to start some shit. The tone, the phrasing, the calm confidence all told me that the caller knew exactly what was going on and was ready to offer me some kind of deal—this was someone, I was (and remain) convinced, who was on the inside and working for the Democratic Party or one of their affiliated entities. This was a player.

Needless to say, I didn't call him back.

Even so, I failed to completely escape the DC circus. At one point a friend of Rick's stopped by to spend the night and enjoy some boardwalk pizza. Alex, a muscular, bald, and friendly Greek whose family was in the restaurant business, didn't follow politics very closely. He showed up with his dog, a friendly black mutt, and asked me why I wasn't on the beach or walking through town. I mentioned the circus on Capitol Hill, and he just shrugged and went off and got a pizza.

About an hour later Alex returned, this time with an entirely different expression. Down at the pizza place my flight to Bethany was the talk of the restaurant. It was on the TV when he ordered, and he said there was an elderly woman at the bar who was loudly defending me. "I wasn't sure who you were a few hours ago," Alex said. "I sure as hell know now."

I was spending my time at the beach house watching baseball and sitting on the porch, afraid to turn on the news. At one point I tried listening to the radio, figuring that the local Delaware stations would have reports about agriculture or beach rentals. The second I clicked the switch I got a local talk radio host. It was a woman, and she was going through my high school yearbook. "I'm looking at it right now," she said. "Wow, those are some good-looking boys."

Finally I decided to venture into town. I wanted to just slip in, pick up some food and some ZzzQuil (nonalcoholic) to help me sleep, and get back to the beach house. It was in this little sojourn that, for about an hour, I got to experience what it was like to be famous. Of course I was recognized—everyone in America knew where I was.

The weird thing about that kind of intense notoriety is that people will greet you as if they know you. They won't even necessarily stop you to talk; they'll just nod and say hello. While I was in the store looking for the ZzzQuil, a pretty girl in her twenties walked past me. She slowed down, looked at my face. Then in a singsong way she said, "Hey-ey you," and kept going. While I was at the counter, a middle-aged man who was walking past with a bag of groceries slowed, then stopped right in front of me and stared into my face. I got out of there.

I also noticed, both at the time and afterwards, that when I was at a social gathering I would hear someone say, "Mark Judge is here." My fame was intense but brief, and it faded pretty quickly after Brett was confirmed. I have no idea how genuinely famous people deal with it every day.

Meanwhile, inevitably, a Post reporter, Gabriel Pogrund, followed me to the beach. What happened next is recounted in his article.

Bethany Beach, Del.—Mark Judge has been conspicuously absent for more than a week: Named as the only witness to an alleged sexual assault by Supreme Court nominee Brett M. Kavanaugh, he has not been seen and has said little beyond a statement released by a lawyer saying he recalled no such incident.

A high school friend of Kavanaugh's, Judge has been absent from his Maryland residence for days as Democratic lawmakers and accuser Christine Blasey Ford have demanded that Republicans summon him before the Senate Judiciary Comm-ittee to answer questions under oath.

On Monday, a Washington Post reporter found Judge holed up in the house of a

longtime friend in Bethany Beach, nearly three hours away. A car in the driveway contained piles of clothing, a collection of Superman comics and a package addressed to Judge at the Potomac home where he lived three years ago.

“How’d you find me?” he said.

The reporter gestured to the car packed with belongings. Judge declined to comment further.

Barbara “Biz” VanGelder, Judge’s lawyer, said she instructed him to leave the D.C. area last week because of an onslaught of criticism and media questions. At the time, the conservative blogger’s life and writings were beginning to come under scrutiny, leading to charges of misogyny and worse.

“I told him to leave town. He is being hounded. He is a recovering alcoholic and is under unbelievable stress,” she said. “He needed for his own health to get out of this toxic environment and take care of himself.”⁸¹

After the reporter left things got quiet—but not for long.

The next night at about three a.m. there was a loud knock on the door of the beach house. Here it was, a literal manifestation of the moment you always hear about in novels and political memoirs. The totalitarian state was pounding on my door in the middle of the night.

I didn’t answer, of course. Respecting the awesome power and diabolical ability of those lined up against me meant facing reality with a clarity that would help me survive.

I then made one of the best decisions of my life. I slipped into an old pair of blue

Birdwell surfing shorts, snuck out the back door, and went to the beach for a swim. I'd go out a few yards, wading deeper into darkness, and tell myself to turn around. But the heart-racing thrill of doing something dangerous made me keep pushing. The lights of the shore became small and distant.

Held in the ocean's embrace, I was completely at peace—gently treading water, enveloped in darkness, my breathing low and steady. I felt both infinitesimal under the starry dome of the sky and powerfully embodied as I floated on the water. In this posture of surrender and trust I felt deeply connected to God and the healing power of Christ.

I was not expressing a death wish but treating symptoms of post-traumatic stress disorder, something I had struggled with since being treated for cancer in 2008. Months of IV tubes, chemotherapy, and vomiting—not to mention huge and unpayable bills—had left me anxious and depressed, emotionally on edge, burdened with shame, and prone to explosions of anger. I experienced dissociation, which caused moments of cognitive blankness. PTSD sufferers can get addicted to adrenaline highs. It was an attempt to feed that need for speed, not just dumb thrill seeking, that led me to go swimming in the ocean in the middle of the night.

I floated on my back, knowing that reporters in the grip of a demonic force that they themselves could barely comprehend were most likely back at the house. There seemed to be no end in sight. It would be a miracle if I survived.

PART TWO

■

FAST TIMES AT GEORGETOWN PREP

It's May 21, 1980, and we're having a party. The Empire Strikes Back has just been released. My older brother ordered a block of two hundred tickets, and we invited all our friends. We rode in a caravan to the KB Cinema in Washington. Now everyone is back at my parents' house in suburban Maryland.

The party is a flowing, noisy, joyful collection of our favorite people. There are Jesuits from Georgetown Prep, where I am about to finish my freshman year. There are members of the Irish group, about fifty people who trace their ancestors back to Ireland and who all grew up in the "Catholic ghetto" of DC. There are friends from the neighborhood. Big band music is playing from my father's boom box. People are drinking, laughing, talking.

In one room Father Hart, my favorite teacher, is drinking a beer and talking with my Jewish next-door neighbor about Pierre Teilhard de Chardin, the priest who, in his writings, argues for the "Cosmic Christ," a theology that weds Christian catechism to evolution. Next to them my brother and our other neighbor, Wino, a teenage guitar player whose heavy metal band is inspired by Black Sabbath, are debating Van Morrison. My father, an editor at National Geographic, is in the kitchen talking with Father Quinn, Prep's headmaster, about Borneo.

Teenage friends of mine mingle, sneak beers, do imitations of teachers, and relive scenes from The Empire Strikes Back. It's James Joyce meets Saturday Night Live—rock and roll, laughs, theology, joy, and love.

For me, the most challenging aspect of school this year has been my struggle with undiagnosed ADHD. Since childhood I have always had trouble paying attention. I cannot organize my room, and at times I feel an almost blinding anxiety when my head overflows with stimuli. I blurt out things that are both highly perceptive and hilariously inappropriate.

In some ways this makes me charming, even exciting. Girls like me. I have

brown hair and blue eyes and I am athletic. At different times during the party, I have been talking to a girl named Jennifer, the younger sister of a friend of my sister's. She is pretty, funny, empathetic. We talk about our school and our teachers. I do my imitation of Mr. Bloom, a five-foot-tall teacher at Prep, old and bald. She laughs.

It is the time before the internet, and I have hours and hours of access to the outdoors, where I can run and play. One of my main joys is skateboarding. I was around six years old in the early 1970s when Frank Nasworthy reinvented the modern skateboard. By the time I am twelve, in 1976, skateboarding has made its way from California across America and become a huge sensation. My friends and I beg our parents to take us to the Sunshine House, a surf shop that sells surfboards and skateboards. We gaze upon the candy apple-red row of Cadillac Wheels and marvel at the photographs in Skateboarder. Fiberflex by Gordon & Smith, Logan Earth Ski, great California brands like Alva Skates, Tracker, and Sims.

I still remember a photograph of a skater whose wheels had caught fire—surely a staged shot, I now realize, but to me as a kid it is a blazing representation of everything cool: speed, grace, and daring. We have grown up on our boards, bombing hills and surfing into driveways in suburban Maryland.

Unlike today's woke psychological hypochondriacs, we 1970s kids pride ourselves on our toughness. Bruises and bandages are signs of honor. Skateboarding has taught us to get up when we fall as well as to live in the world as it is, not as we wish it to be. If you take a spill a couple miles from home, you just hump it back home with a bloody knee.

I have also discovered literature. My father is a writer and Catholic mystic with a capacious intellect who seems to have read almost every book. A funny man who is almost instantly loved by any person who meets him, his job at National Geographic is to go around the world to interesting places and write stories about them. My brother says we're being raised by someone who is equal parts Ernest Hemingway, Thomas Merton, John F. Kennedy, and Norman Mailer—with a dash of Spike Jones. He loves Irish whiskey and good conversation and books, and he also understands the reality of evil and the shadow element in the human psyche.

My father encourages us to read widely, particularly three great fantasy series:

The Lord of the Rings, The Chronicles of Narnia, and Ursula K. Le Guin's The Earthsea Cycle, a trilogy that in retrospect profoundly shaped my outlook.

Back at the party, my brother has switched out my father's big band music for Bruce Springsteen. Girls start dancing; people are laughing. My best friend Dylan starts jokingly practicing his Latin—amo, amas, amat—then asks if I like my section. Prep has broken the freshman class into four sections. Section One is the guys who are high achieving and get great grades—guys like Brett Kavanaugh, who I know on sight but have not yet become friends with. Dylan and I are in Section Two.

"Section One are wankers," Dylan says. He mimics a masturbatory gesture and starts to dance. Theology. Sex. Slapstick. We're sixteen. The house is pulsing with what Zen priest Dainin Katagiri calls "the life force," which can turn delusion into enlightenment.⁸²

Now in his den, my father is in deep discussion about demonic possession with Father John Nicola, a priest at Prep and the author of the 1974 book Diabolical Possession and Exorcism. Nicola is a towering man with neatly combed gray hair.

"The point of the demonic in The Exorcist," Dad says, "is not to levitate bodies, vomit on priests, and telepathically toss furniture around the room. The point is to convince human beings that we are animalistic and not worthy of God's love." Father Nicola nods and starts to describe the behavior he witnessed while performing an actual exorcism.

Dylan is dancing. My father is talking theology. The beers are in a large tub out front, and I slip out for another one. Jennifer is there, looking up at the stars. She smiles, and we kiss. I fish a beer out of the tub.

It's June 10, 1981, and I've just met a kid named Brett Kavanaugh.

I'm in Ocean City, Maryland, with a bunch of guys from Georgetown Prep.

Ocean City is a summer tourist spot, a nine-mile strip of land on the larger Delmarva peninsula. It has the Atlantic on one side and Assawoman Bay on the other, and the strip in between is a collection of hotel, motels, and beach houses. There is a boardwalk on the south end and high-rise condos on the north end, before Coastal Highway heads into Delaware. You're surrounded by water. You live on beer, Thrasher's fries, Dumser's ice cream, pizza, and gyros.

Our house is a white two-story rental on 42nd Street. On each side of us are similar houses filled with girls. Each one has been rented by a different all-girls school. One is Visitation and the other is Holy Names.

We know some of these girls. There's Laura Williams and Nina Ricci and Elizabeth Key and Molly Keefe sunning themselves in front of the Visitation house, and Rebecca Mortimer and Candice and Laura Esposito and Anne Sato doing the same in front of the Holy Names house. Rebecca Bernard is here, with her curly and wavy golden hair and beautiful French face. There's this girl named Isabella Bailon who is very cute and smart.

It's the Washington Catholic ghetto. A lot of these kids have known each other since birth. We have a chaperone, the older brother of one of the guys, but no one has seen him in a while.

I'm on the front porch sitting on an Adirondack chair in the sun. I'm wearing Ray-Bans, an OP bathing suit, and a Washington Redskins T-shirt with Kenny Houston's number, twenty-seven, on it. I'm reading *No Man Is an Island* by Thomas Merton and listening to the Who's *Quadrophenia*.

Some of the guys are inside having lunch and others are on the beach. There's Dylan, P.J. and Squee, Fletch, and Tim Muller who loves Elvis Costello and the Cars and J. R. R. Tolkien and is always arguing about music with Matt Walsh, the Led Zeppelin freak. They take turns playing music on the boom box, going from the classic rock of Zeppelin and Pink Floyd and the Stones to the postpunk of Costello and the New Wave of the Cars.

The one band everyone agrees on, including the girls, is Earth, Wind & Fire. "September" always gets everybody dancing. The handsome Italian guy, Tom, who drives a Camaro, is here, and a tall, skinny, redheaded guy named Brendan who is on the roof hitting golf balls into the ocean. There is Kelly, a tall, blonde guy who is very cynical and funny. Dave, who looks like rock star Rick

Springfield, is here. There are jocks and nerds and drama club guys, but these groups aren't really as segregated as at other schools. We have football players who are also in school plays and rock and rollers who run track or play basketball.

We are sophomores at Prep and have formed a brotherhood. We talk and laugh and listen to music and play miniature golf and some guys drink beers and some guys smoke weed. We are ironic and self-deprecating, calling each other "stud" because behind the jokes and bragging we're still a bit intimidated by girls—at least I am. Dylan and I stay up all night talking about music and art and politics and girls and cars and our families.

According to the Georgetown Prep informational brochure, we are supposed to become men in full—men for others, literate, caring, faithful. Contemplatives in action.

St. Ignatius believed that as individuals come to understand the world and develop a more robust vision of it, they are led to think and act in new ways. He understood this integral connection between knowing and acting, and he hoped that Jesuits and the graduates of their schools would become "contemplatives in action." Our spirituality is grounded in the conviction that God is active in our world. The spiritual path laid out by Ignatius helps us discern God's presence, to find God in all things, reaching out to a diverse, grace filled yet imperfect world. We bring this spirituality into the wider human context as we strive for social justice, peace and dialogue. Being a contemplative in action means that our active life feeds our contemplative life and our contemplative life informs our active life.⁸³

My spiritual/contemplative teenage world at this time consists of rock and roll, books, God, and girls. I've always been good at sports; I was a standout on my Little League baseball team and can still ride a skateboard better than most guys. Still, I am wary of the jock culture. My older brothers warned me that there is bullying at Prep, and I experienced it when I was a freshman. Older guys who played football will shove you around. Some of them are impressed when they discover that my grandfather was a professional baseball player for the

Washington Nationals. Some of the jocks, like my best friend Dylan, are really nice guys. Others are total assholes. Some of the teachers suck up to the jocks, their obsequiousness making me sick. Kelly says we should start an underground newspaper, like a National Lampoon, to mock the jocks—and everybody else—because the official one, the Hoya, is too boring.

Mr. James, my English teacher, has revealed Shakespeare to me. I read Romeo and Juliet and was transfixed, then followed that with MacBeth. I have struggled in math and science classes but got As on my English papers. Mr. James actually talked about my Romeo and Juliet paper in class, and when I got detention—known as JUG, or Justice Under God—he let me watch Franco Zeffirelli's Romeo and Juliet and Roman Polanski's MacBeth.

My other favorite teacher is Father Hart, who teaches religion. He's thin but in shape, with closely cut dark hair, almond eyes, and a kind face. Hart is in his forties, one of the younger and more liberal Jesuits. (The older ones tend to be hard-asses, former boxers, conservative.) He was in his twenties in the 1960s, and he sometimes talks about seeing the Who, Jimi Hendrix, the Rolling Stones.

Father Hart is a remarkable mix: a deeply faithful Catholic mystic, a classical liberal advocating the true meaning of social justice (treating everyone as a child of God), and a rock-and-roll rebel. He has a face that somewhat resembles Albert Camus. One of his nicknames is "Screwtape" because in his religion class he taught The Screwtape Letters by C.S. Lewis.

Father Hart is like a beloved older brother to me. If I say something dumb or vulgar or rude, he will sharply rebuke me. His musical tastes range from classical to jazz to Johnny Cash, from Hendrix to Devo to Sting. He is brilliant and widely read and adores Jesus.

When we first met, I was in JUG and he came in to supervise. I had the reputation of being something of a rowdy, and Father Hart was expressionless as he set himself up at the teacher's desk up front. "Fair is foul, and foul is fair," I heard him mutter, a quote from MacBeth. I shot back, "False face must hide what the false heart doth know."⁸⁴

Hart did a double take. From there the conversation went to Thomas Merton and Dorothy Day to Quadrophenia to Ronald Reagan, to C.S. Lewis to the spirituality of George Harrison to the Civil War. We became friends.

Father Hart gave me *No Man Is an Island* to read and quoted one of the first paragraphs: “Why do we spend our lives striving to be something that we would never want to be, if only we knew what we wanted? Why do we waste our time doing things which, if we only stopped to think about them, are just the opposite of what we were made for?”⁸⁵

He also let me write a paper about Quadrophenia, the “rock opera” by the Who. It is set in England in the early 1960s, and a teenager, Jimmy—Pete Townshend’s alter ego—is feeling pulled apart. He has been diagnosed as schizophrenic, but he claims he is actually “quadrophenic,” having four personalities. The diagnosis is a metaphor for the different personalities that adolescents attach themselves to in order to fit in. Where’s “the real me?” Not even Jimmy knows who he is. “Rarely has the teenage tension between both wanting to fit in and be respected for one’s individuality been explored with more passion, insight or humor,” I wrote. He gave me an A and wrote across the top, YOU HAVE A GIFT FOR WRITING STAY OUT OF JUG.

Now I’m sitting on the porch reading Merton when Dylan appears. Brett Kavanaugh is with him. “Contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life,” Merton writes in a passage I will remember all my life. “It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant Source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that Source.”⁸⁶ The passage is not only a credo of sorts but has also become inseparable in my mind from my meeting with Brett.

Brett notices my Kenny Houston jersey. He loves it: “Hey, Kenny Houston! ‘The Tackle.’” He knows about Kenny Houston and the famous Tackle.

It was October 8, 1973: the Washington Redskins were in an important game against the Dallas Cowboys. Brett and I were both boys at the game but sitting in different sections. The Cowboys led the game 7–0 until just under four minutes remained in the final quarter. Redskins quarterback Sonny Jurgensen and receiver Charley Taylor combined on a touchdown pass with three minutes and thirty-nine seconds remaining. Three plays later, safety Brig Owens intercepted a pass from Dallas quarterback Craig Morton and returned it twenty-six yards for a 14–7 Redskins advantage. There were sixty seconds left in the game.

The Cowboys quickly moved the ball downfield and were faced with fourth-and-

goal from the Washington six-yard line. With only one play Morton sent fullback Walt Garrison out of his backfield and hit him over the middle. Garrison was inches from scoring. He was stopped by Hall of Fame safety Ken Houston who had arrived at the same time, halting his momentum.

It's the most famous tackle in Redskins history. It's why I got the shirt.

"One of the greatest plays in Redskins history," I say.

"I was at that game," Brett says. "Fourth-and-goal from the Washington six-yard line with time for one last play. Defensive captain Chris Hanburger called a combo-c coverage. Owens would take tight end Jean Fugett if he cut inside, leaving fullback Walt Garrison for Houston."

"Houston hog-tied him," I say.

Brett is delighted. He's smiling, affirming, nodding. "Garrison caught the pass just shy of the goal line, but Houston, a linebacker in college, refused to let him get any further. Garrison couldn't get his right leg down because Houston had the off-season rodeo rider hog-tied. Houston said, 'It was as quiet as it has ever been on a football field.'"

I have heard that Brett is really smart, but he's affable and funny. He's not a nerd; he's good-looking and knows about sports. His parents are fairly well-off and belong to an exclusive country club. But he's friendly, not arrogant. He's cool.

He's also shy with girls. At one point when we're all sitting around on the beach and the subject of how to approach girls comes up, Brett reveals that he prepares a list of questions to ask a girl when he calls her. Who's her favorite teacher? What's her favorite subject? What's her favorite book or movie? The guys find this hilarious. I ask Brett what happens when he gets to the end of the list: "Do you just go back to the beginning and start again?"

After we become friends, Brett and I and our group become inseparable. We see each other every day at school and talk almost every night on the phone.

Brett and I bond over our shared love of sports, music, faith, Washington, DC, and the pop culture of the 1980s. Sports is our strongest connection. We have both grown up with the great Washington sports teams, the Bullets and the Redskins. We know the names of all the players on the 1978 championship Bullets team, and we compare notes on the Redskins games we attended as kids.

On Fridays, after we get off from our summer jobs, Brett picks me and a couple other guys up in his blue Chevy Malibu for a trip to Ocean City or Rehoboth Beach. We buy some beer, then pore over our cassettes trying to decide what to play, and for the next few days we are surrounded by music. There is AC/DC, Michael Jackson, David Bowie, the Cure, Bob Seger, the Go-Go's, Prince, the Pretenders, Bruce Springsteen, U2, the Who, Elton John. There are songs about working people, songs about God, songs about girls, songs about parties, songs written and performed by strong women like Chrissie Hynde and Suzi Quatro. Our biggest shared musical love is U2, whose breakthrough album *Rattle and Hum* will be released the winter of our senior year.

Brett is generally liked and admired by his peers. He's a friendly person who loves to laugh and warms up quickly when approached with good will. Brett can talk about sports, but also novels, Latin literature, politics, movies, religion, and (of course) the law. He has a great sense of humor, sarcastic and self-deprecating. Brett is also active in the church and in Catholic outreach to the poor and homeless.

Like all of us, he also has some people who dislike him. Of course, back then it isn't about politics or ideology but for the usual petty adolescent reasons. Maybe competition over a girl, jealousy of his family's relative wealth and status, or just an inadvertent slight. A great student and athlete, Brett has naturally risen to the top of the class. For some, this is reason enough.

One guy who dislikes him is my buddy Fletch who I work with on the Hoya and the yearbook. Fletch, whose family is less well-off than Brett's, thinks he is standoffish and entitled. What Fletch sees as aloofness is to me a sign of someone who is a bit quiet around people he doesn't know well.

Fletch's favorite story from high school was about how he almost single-

handedly foiled Brett's campaign to become student body president. Most of the candidates had put serious time and effort and money into their campaigns. One guy even hired a professional artist from Mad Magazine to do his posters.

The underdogs were two guys I'll call Peter and George. Peter and George were not jocks or amazing scholars, but they were popular and very nice guys, both with a great sense of humor. George was white and Peter black, and they played up the racial angle in their campaign. They talked about their "ebony and ivory" ticket and made references to the Emancipation and the Civil War, which we were then learning about in history. One day on my way to lunch in the main building, I saw that the two had set up a table serving watermelon and Oreo cookies. Like so much else about the culture we grew up in, this kind of thing would be considered shocking today. But at the time we all found it hilarious.

Fletch loved these guys and had set about trying to tip the election in their favor. He was relentless, going from locker to locker, preaching about how rigged and ridiculous the election was, and saying that if we wanted to accomplish something real, we should vote "the Oreo ticket." He was very convincing. Even I voted for them. In a surprise upset victory, they won the election.

Brett is competitive and hates to lose. It's a strong trait that used to be admired. It has nothing to do with being ambitious or entitled. People often have trouble understanding that someone can be genuinely modest and still want to win.

Fletch also loves to tell the story of how a kid named Tom Reese purloined the Kavanaughs' membership number for the elite Congressional Country Club. Reese used the number to sneak in numerous times and spent several weeks playing golf and ordering beers, Bloody Marys, and steak sandwiches before Mr. Kavanaugh noticed the irregularities on his bill. Reese also plays basketball, and his fans—most of our class—are irritated that he isn't getting more game time. We started a chant: "All we are saying is give Reese a chance."

Brett is also on the team and has played well enough to become captain. He is confident in the games, scoring high and consistently delivering under pressure. His practice ethic is phenomenal. I once took him on one-on-one and quickly knew I was outmatched. As jovial and even sweet as he is off the court, on it he is all execution.

Brett and I are very different. Where I am loud, gregarious, daring, and

sometimes stupid, Brett is quiet, studious, modest. His modesty comes from his parents. The Kavanaughs are relatively well-to-do and politically connected. His father is a lobbyist on Capitol Hill. I sometimes hear that the Kavanaughs are friends with some politicians on the Hill, but you never know who they are. They never brag or drop names. When you go to their house the talk is about sports, books, music, movies—the usual things.

High schoolers, especially boys, often imitate older people, both parents and teachers, in both tribute and mockery. Our teachers are particularly savaged—the older Jesuit with the beer gut, tiny Mr. James with the gravelly voice, even Father Hart, who tends to bare his teeth when he gets mad. It says a lot that we never joke about Brett's parents. Everyone genuinely likes and respects them—especially Mrs. Kavanaugh, who has been a trailblazer as a female attorney and has tutored unprivileged kids in inner-city Washington. The Jesuits talk about social justice and public service, but this soft-spoken mom with the kind smile is doing it.

Another theme of our friendship is a shared proclivity to discern spiritual and religious themes in popular music. Driving down to the beach, we play David Bowie (Brett loves ChangesOne), Prince, R.E.M.—and crank it up when “40” by U2 comes on. Its lyrics are taken from 40:1–3:

I waited patiently for the Lord; He inclined to me and heard my cry. He drew me up from the desolate pit, Out of the miry bog...He put a new song in my mouth. A song of praise to our God.

The song has a special meaning for us. It represents the vitality of rock and roll, our Irish roots, and the Catholic faith we have been raised in. Whenever it comes on in a club or on the radio, we smile and nod to one another. It's like a prayer we share.

It's May 1982. We're studying stream of consciousness in Mr. Baily's English class, and I decide to write in stream of consciousness for a few days like right now I am thinking about John Riggins and this amazing girl I met named Caitlin who goes to Holy Child and she has black hair and a pretty face and I think I am going to lose my virginity to her soon like maybe this weekend.

Mom is worried about me. Mom is affirming and kind and is worried about me getting into too much trouble at Prep but it's cool because I am going to be eighteen soon.

Dad just got back from Africa he is writing a story about it for National Geographic. Me and mom picked him up from Dulles. He was tired but slept for a couple days and feels good now. I tell him I'm writing in stream of consciousness and he chuckles and says something about James Joyce and Ulysses being an incredible book but it was banned because Ireland is really Catholic and how my mother's ancestors are from Mayo and I look really Irish to him. My brother gave him this book Dune to read and he's recovering from Africa by laying on the couch reading it. My brother tells me that AC/DC is crap and I should listen to Springsteen.

The mornings are cool and beautiful with summer coming and some days you don't mind the blue blazer and tie—the unofficial official school uniform—because there's a little breeze and I feel good pulling into the Prep parking lot where I park my dad's black Volkswagen Beetle that I inherited to drive to school. It struggles getting up hills the engine weak and like slower than a bicycle and sometimes I think mutherfucka I'm gonna die in this heap.

It's not like the Charger Dylan drives the one we were in when he outran the cop. It was on River Road and we had been to a party where a bunch of seniors were and we had a few beers and it was getting late and Dylan was driving and we were coming down River Road and suddenly the cherry lights were behind us but the cop was a ways back pulling out from his hiding place and Dylan said I can outrun him and I'm like holy fuck we are going to jail and Dylan guns it like Han Solo and we are down River and off Bradley and down Persimmon Tree and into a neighborhood and Dylan spots a house with an open garage and he actually fucking pulls in and we jump out and we're kind of giggling and Dylan is doing the Rosco giggle from The Dukes of Hazzard and he pulls the door down and we wait and wait and wait and breathe and then we hear nothing. We kind of sit there for a few minutes but nobody is home in the house and we are

laughing and punching each other in the arm.

I talk to Brett or Squee or Kelly or Dylan every night. We talk about girls and sports and school and Van Halen and make jokes about masturbation and farts and imitate our teachers—Father McGut with the huge beer belly and the effeminate existentialist Brother Twinkle Toes and alkie Father McCoy and our hippie music teacher Mr. Maud. We make fun of our goofy haircuts and laugh about what godly studs we are when we're really not. We are reading *The Crucible* and *To Kill a Mockingbird* and *Fahrenheit 451* and *Lord of the Flies* and *The Catcher in the Rye* and *Brave New World* and *1984*. My brother also gave me this book of short stories by Raymond Carver and Anne Rice's *Interview with the Vampire*.

The main book I am obsessed with is *Dispatches* by Michael Herr. It's about Vietnam. We have this awesome history teacher Mr. Murray and he's teaching us about the war. Every year he makes his classes reenact the court martial trial that resulted from the My Lai massacre and we get assigned reading from the time. *Dispatches* is an incredible book and some of it is written in stream of consciousness but it's cool stream of consciousness not like this shit I'm doing here.

Caitlin likes this writer Ann Beattie. She gave me this book called *Chilly Scenes of Winter* about how boring and sucky the suburbs were in the 1970s and how everyone was kind of having a mental breakdown. Caitlin's really pretty but sometimes there's like this sadness about her, I think because her mom died when she was little. Her dad is a dentist and she is really funny and sexy. She always likes to give me a bunch of shit: "Yeah, you guys are such studs. Didn't you have a party where there were, like, no girls there? Like serious, not a single girl showed up." It's true.

"We prefer it that way," I say.

She howls. "Right! You want to hang out and drink beers and smoke cigars and wrestle with each other. You guys are such studs."

"You just perfectly planned out our Super Bowl party this year."

She laughs and it's so pretty I have to catch my breath a little.

We met around Christmas at this little grocery store she works at part time in

Bethesda. I was visiting my older brother who is an actor who lives in DC and on my way home to Potomac I stopped at this little corner store with a red neon sign that says BEER and she recognized me because everyone at the Catholic schools knows or has heard of everyone else.

“You’re Mark Judge,” she said.

I was ready to marry her right then and there. I said yes I am and she explained the usual grapevine thing that always happens because somebody’s mother is married to a guy who went to Gonzaga or Prep and their daughter has a friend who went to school with my sister and knows Squee or Seamus and recognized me because I am wearing a Prep jacket and she saw me at a football game once. Or something. I was actually thinking of buying some beer with the fake ID Fletch made me in the yearbook office but got chips and a Coke instead. If she knows I’m a junior she knows I’m seventeen. I kept going back to the store every week until I asked her to go see Fast Times at Ridgemont High and we’ve been together ever since.

The guys are cool; we are like brothers. Brett and I are on the baseball team together and he tells me I should play football next year. We played Landon and I was up with the score tied 2–2 in the seventh inning and Tim Scott was on second base and I hit a drive into left field and Caitlin was at the game and my hands were shaking with adrenaline when I slid into second base. Brett was really fired up he always encourages me though not in a blatant way but in kind of a quiet way like “Don’t give up stud, keep swinging” or something like that. He gets this look like he knows he can give you some good advice but doesn’t want to be a know-it-all. I think I might try out for football this summer although the camp in August is supposed to be brutal.

My dad says in Africa they have these rituals for boys becoming men and they have to like get cut and bleed or something and I think I need to get cut maybe on the football field.

Brett and I are opposites. Where he is quiet and reserved I am kind of the class clown. I can make people laugh like the other day when I imitated our gym teacher Mr. Ray who everyone calls Magnum P.E. because he has a mustache and looks like Tom Selleck. I hiked up my shorts until the waistband was at my chest and yelled out in a nasally bird call, I NEED YOU GUYS TO BREAK INTO TWO GROUPS RIGHT NOW FORM TWO LINES AND COUNT OFF.

I angle the red dodgeball to ricochet off the wall and bounce off his melon and I am just killing it.

Some jocks are really cool, even shy and sensitive. You really don't know until you get to know them. This one guy I've become friends with, everyone calls him the Beast but I think it's ironic because he's soft-spoken and gentle. He drives his dad's used Porsche and fucking loves the Human League. It's crazy, you hear about a guy named the Beast and then he pulls up in this old rust-red Porsche with "Don't You Want Me" blasting out the windows.

Me and Brett talk about girls and music. I took him to Kemp Mill and told him what was good, U2, the Pretenders, Talk Talk. Brett is also reticent about engaging in male locker-room banter. When I talk about a hot girl and say I love her tits or ass and want to screw her Brett kind of looks awkward for a few seconds and then changes the subject.

He's kind of a nerd and a scholar. One time I was walking past a classroom and peeked in and he was just buried in this book. The class was AP Latin and they were translating out loud: Herodotus Halicarnassus, quæ quum cæteris de rebus, tum de caussa bellorum Græcos inter Barbarosque gestorum, perquirendo cognovit, ea his libris consignata in publicum edit; ne, quæ ab hominibus gesta sunt, progressu temporis oblivion deleantur, neve præclara mirabiliaque facta, quæ vel a Græcis edita sunt vel a Barbaris, sua laude fraudentur.⁸⁷ Like everyone else at Prep I have to take two years of Latin but I don't have the discipline to move into the advanced classes. Some of these guys want to eventually speak Latin fluently.

Me and Brett were both born in DC and I know he has copies of the Bob Woodward books *All the President's Men* and *The Brethren: Inside the Supreme Court* but there are really two DCs, the real city and then the political city which is more like the bubble on Capitol Hill. The real city is Georgetown and U Street where my brother acts at the Source Theater and Brookland and Catholic University and Howard University which has amazing-looking girls and St. Elizabeth's the nut ward where one of my older relatives had to go before I was born.

I think I love Caitlin. She gets Richard Price and *Blade Runner* and art and has dark hair like my mom and a smart face and isn't like those Catholic girls who are going to marry one of these guys and never leave the DC circle. I wish I went

to Prep she says that campus is like a college campus the Holy Names campus isn't even a campus it's just a few buildings and I say you poor baby you need to do a fundraiser for the poor HN girls of Potomac and she says that it's a good idea the Jesuits can play a fundraiser. We'll have this Feed the Children footage and music except it will be Holy Names students and we laugh and I think of the Jesuits this band of four guys from my class that only know a few songs but play "She's So Cold" really, really well.

I am home on a Saturday afternoon and I hear Wino next door practicing with his band. He fronts this doom metal band called the Obsessed and is four years older than me. (Seamus is in love with his sister who is blonde and very hot). A lot of afternoons I will be reading or trying to study although I have trouble paying attention and I will hear these fucking doom metal riffs like molten lava just churning out of the house next door and sometimes I will go and Wino will nod because he knows me and I will watch them jam.

Wino has long black hair and looks like some crazy wild man and I think of my dad in Africa. Dad says in Africa they have rituals for turning boys into men but we don't have those in the West we don't cut our boys so they bleed and as a result our boys are kind of sissified. The guys in Dispatches aren't sissified they are warriors but they come back wounded. Then dad says come into the den and there are hundreds of books on shelves and his desk and he says sit down I need you to hear something and he reads this:

A decline in courage may be the most striking feature which an outside observer notices in the West in our days. The Western world has lost its civil courage, both as a whole and separately, in each country, each government, each political party, and, of course, in the United Nations. Such a decline in courage is particularly noticeable among the ruling groups and the intellectual elite, causing an impression of loss of courage by the entire society. Of course, there are many courageous individuals, but they have no determining influence on public life.

Political and intellectual bureaucrats show depression, passivity, and perplexity in their actions and in their statements, and even more so in theoretical reflections to explain how realistic, reasonable, as well as intellectually and even

morally worn it is to base state policies on weakness and cowardice. And decline in courage is ironically emphasized by occasional explosions of anger and inflexibility on the part of the same bureaucrats when dealing with weak governments and with countries not supported by anyone, or with currents which cannot offer any resistance. But they get tongue-tied and paralyzed when they deal with powerful governments and threatening forces, with aggressors and international terrorists.

Should one point out that from ancient times declining courage has been considered the beginning of the end?⁸⁸

Dad, who did not vote for Reagan but hates communism, says that Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn is this great Russian writer and did you understand what I read? I said yes and dad said good I love you now what are you doing today? I say going to the Philips with Caitlin and dad looks happy. He tells me I need to read this book Darkness at Noon by Arthur Koestler and I tell him and that he needs to read Dispatches.

Me and Caitlin are going to the Philips Collection which was the first modern art museum when it was built in 1921 and she has to go there for a homework assignment and my dad says that's real cool you guys should enjoy that. We look at Henri Matisse and Pablo Picasso and Georgia O'Keeffe and Caitlin is so alive and beautiful and she loves the paintings.

I drive her back to Bethesda in the black Volkswagen bug that is death on wheels and she says come on inside and we are inside and her parents are not there they are playing tennis or something at the country club they belong to. We go inside and she says she has to hear "Tainted Love" and puts it on the turntable and it fills the living room and then we are kissing and I have left my body somewhere and her clothes are off and "Tainted Love" slips into "Where Did Our Love Go" and I think of Africa.

It's August 1982. Football camp starts tomorrow. I have to report to Prep tonight, and I've already packed my bags. I have shorts, cleats, T-shirts—and a copy of Playboy.

My dad wants to talk to me before I go. I meet him in the den. It's a small room at the front of the house. It's like walking into a little museum and library. There are books on shelves all along one wall, then more in bookcases. Just above his desk is a signed black-and-white photograph of John F. Kennedy. Dad worked for JFK at one point.

There are artifacts he's collected from traveling around the world as a journalist for National Geographic. A small Buddhist prayer wheel from India. Tribal art from Borneo. A pint glass from Ireland. A Zulu shield hangs on one wall, and a satchel from Israel on another. On his desk, dad has been doing a sketch for the Very Senior Prom. He is hiring the Glenn Miller Orchestra to play at a dance for him and some of his friends. He loves the big band music of the 1940s.

I look up on the wall to dad's autographed picture of Kennedy. I ask him if he still thinks about Kennedy. He does. He says that in the 1960s Norman Mailer described the American "double life"—one "concrete, factual, practical and unbelievably dull" but with a shadow side, the "subterranean river of untapped, ferocious, lonely and romantic desires, that concentration of ecstasy and violence which is the dream life of the nation."⁸⁹ John F. Kennedy, Mailer wrote, "has a patina of that other life, the second American life, the long electric night with the fires of neon leading down the highway to the murmur of jazz."⁹⁰

"Listen," dad says gently as I sit down in the big red chair across from his desk. "I understand you wanting to play football and be with your buddies. I'm just concerned you might get hurt. You're not the biggest guy out there."

He's right. I'm like five foot eight and one-hundred-fifty pounds. Wide receiver or halfback.

"I'll be fine," I say. I'm trying to sound nonchalant so he doesn't worry.

"How long does football camp last?"

"A week."

He looks at me like he's uncertain, then changes his expression. "Well, just be careful. Don't be a hot dog."

He always calls it hot dogging when someone shows off in sports. Athletics have always come easily to me, but I try not to hot dog.

Then he starts talk about how in cultures around the world there are rituals for young men who want to test themselves.

"Rites of initiation provided a formalized ritual to signal that a young man was becoming an adult," dad says. "They showed that a boy had entered into a larger cosmic drama. It meant that his life had meaning not just in the community, but also to God." He pulls a book down. "Here's how Jung described it: 'That gives peace, when people feel they are living the symbolic life, that they are actors in the divine drama. That gives the only meaning to human life; everything else is banal.... A career, producing of children, all are maya [illusions] compared with that one thing, that your life is meaningful.'"91

"Like Star Wars," I say. "Luke Skywalker has to go through a lengthy and difficult training and initiation process not only to become physically powerful but also to learn the ways of the Force, the thing that holds the entire universe together. Right?"

We talk about W. Somerset Maugham's *The Razor's Edge*. Dad gave it to me earlier in the summer. It tells the story of Larry Darrell, a young man who returns to America after World War I disillusioned and looking for answers. He turns down job offers from banks and stock companies, causing problems with his would-be wife. Instead he seeks out manual labor with the lower classes. He works in a coal mine in France. Then he studies with Benedictines in Germany, and finally arrives in India, where he has a spiritual awakening. Ultimately he returns to America, but he will spend his life doing manual labor so he "can keep the mind free while also accomplishing something."⁹² Darrell has achieved that rarest of things—goodness.

Dad is working on a talk he is going to give to the seniors at Holy Names, my sister's high school. I ask him what he is going say. He reads what he has to me:

When Sister Miriam first talked to me about inflicting this punishment on you,

she hinted at my lack of real qualification.

I said, “I have peered into the inner recesses of being and seen the heavens opened.”

She said, “OK, give us five minutes’ worth.”

OK, here’s five minutes’ worth. From now on, you are the point man of your own soul. Up to now, your life has been derived from the wishes and command of your parents, the intentions of teachers, the friendship and cruelty of peers, and the tidal pull of popular culture, with its glittering, comforting fads.

It is exactly now, on this splendid day of achievement, that your chances of leading a true life are better than they will ever get. You have four independent years ahead in which to practice the required deceit and treachery that may keep you free.

Believe me, you have to be a traitor to this world. You have to meet with yourself in secret and conspire with your heart and mind to avoid those engraved and perfumed invitations to become a witless collector and spender of wealth, a status lunatic, a success imbecile.

They can hardly wait to sign up in the funny farm of contemporary American life.

Millions fall for it: they permit their lives to be decided for them—by social

pressure; by competitive communications media anxious to appeal to the prurient and the pathetic; by wanton hucksterism; by notions of celebrity that glorify mindless human personality.

You can do something for me. Keep in touch with the mystical, the marvelous, the miraculous. I worry about the future of the human imagination in a world of home computers, packaged entertainments, videodiscs, satellite communications, a world of one hundred fifty-three channels riding on the foul-smelling wind of advertising into your living rooms. Someone has to safeguard the ability to sit and dream, to set sail in your mind for the horizons and bring back the precious cargoes, the frankincense and myrrh of poetry and emotion. Someone has to safeguard the life of fey and fairy and epic that underlies the folklore of all people.

It is the way of the world that you will be lied to, stepped on, hurt, disappointed, discouraged, ill, and finally aged. So what. Against those sure things the true life offers beauty, charm, friendship, beauty, and a way through. The love that hurts, heals. The loss leads to finding other values. Disappointment improves the appreciation of other things.

When I was a boy, I dreamed I would go to Borneo and meet a headhunter with a blowgun, and he would take me to his long house and he would show me his nubile women and we would get drunk on rice wine and praise the rain falling. When I was grown up, I went to Borneo to meet a headhunter with a blowgun, and he took me to his long house and he showed me his nubile women and we got drunk on rice wine and praised the rain falling. It was absolutely satisfying in every respect.

See you in Borneo.

I love my dad's idea that we have a cosmic destiny and that we shouldn't waste our lives, that we should make our lives matter. It is a powerful message for a teenage boy to hear. A lot of people my age are thinking about becoming dentists or lawyers. I am being raised by Hemingway.

After I talk to dad I go over to see Fletch. I want to see what's going on with plans for the yearbook and the underground newspaper. I drive to his house in Bethesda.

Fletch has been going through some yearbooks of other schools so that we have something to get inspired by, or to work against. The 1982 Prep yearbook is really good. It has good photography and some funny stuff in it.

I have brought some old copies of Rolling Stone that I found in my brother's closet. I tell Fletch that the magazine won a 1970 National Magazine Award because it "challenged the assumptions and conventions of our readership and our generation."⁹³ Rolling Stone won the award for its fearless overage of the hippie holocaust at the Rolling Stones concert at the Altamont Speedway in California. The Stones, jealous that they had missed the Woodstock music festival, mounted their own show and hired the Hells Angels for security.

"Think about it," I tell him. "Rolling Stone, the very bible of the rock counterculture, investigated the lack of planning and drugfueled idiocy that led to chaos and four deaths at the concert."

"It was hubris," he said. "We learned about that in history class. Hubris."

Calling it rock's "worst" day, a Rolling Stone writer described the scene this way: "Flickering silhouettes of people trying to find warmth around the blazing trash reminded one of the medieval paintings of tortured souls in the Dance of Death."⁹⁴ A writer in the equally radical 1960s magazine Ramparts observed, "We all seemed beyond the law at Altamont, out there willingly, all 300,000 of us, Stones and Angels included, and on our own."

"Beyond the law," Fletch whispers, looking at the photographs. "That's crazy."

I drive over to Prep in the black Beetle. The radio is broken, but I have a little portable boom box that I got from Circuit City and listen to Who's Next. Altamont, the Redskins, Pete Townshend, it's all kind of swimming in my head. What does it mean to be a man? The only one who seems totally integrated, who

is masculine and tough and yet can appreciate art and poetry and wine, is my dad.

I arrive. The school has a completely different vibe here now. Kind of ghostly in a way. The halls of the main building, where we will be living in the upstairs rooms, are dim and full of echoes.

Guys are arriving, finding their rooms, putting their stuff away. Brett is all business. He smiles, but there's no joking around. He has the most insane work ethic I've ever seen for an athlete. He's on the varsity basketball team and is in the gym practicing all the time, even after the rest of the team members have gone home for dinner. The thing is, he's not one of those asshole jocks who lord it over other people, something I think is because he's a really good natural athlete but not a great one. Mother nature just didn't give him that, so he has to work for it.

They put me in a little room by myself, right next to Father Marriott, an old Italian priest who is mostly bald and has a beer gut. I forgot that a lot of the priests live here all the time.

I unpack my stuff, just some pairs of shorts and some sneakers and a few T-shirts. They provide all the equipment.

I walk down the halls and listen for some music coming out of rooms. There is AC/DC, Michael Jackson, Bowie, the Cure, Bob Seger, the Go-Go's, Prince, the Pretenders, Springsteen, U2, the Who, Elton John.

Van Halen is probably Brett's favorite band. He loves their technical skill but also the comedic aspect, the vaudeville showmanship of David Lee Roth. We sometimes rank the best Van Halen albums, and we agree that their first was a masterpiece and behind that is Fair Warning, and then maybe Van Halen II. Van Halen represents everything great about America—the virtue of foundational principles (Michael Anthony and Alex Van Halen's rhythm section), the made-in-the-garage innovative American genius (Eddie Van Halen) and the loudmouthed freedom of anyone to say what they think (David Lee Roth).

I go back to my room and look at the Playboy I brought with me. It's got an interview with John Lennon and a story by Ray Bradbury. The centerfold is Karen Price, who has enormous breasts. I want to have sex with her, but there's more—I kind of want to be in love with her, to cherish her, to be her man in

sunny California.

I fall asleep. The next thing I know it's six a.m. and my alarm is going off. Already in the distance I can hear Coach Reagan: "YESSIR TODAY IS A GOOD DAY TO DIE!"

When you get to football camp, all the joking and clowning comes to a stop. I see Brett going down the hall after practice and onto the field, but he is segregated for most of the week with the veteran players.

Practice in August in the Maryland heat is brutal. You do drills all morning, including the "nutcracker," where the running back—me and a few other victims—take a handoff and run straight into a snarling line of defense players. You'd "get your bell rung" and stagger out of it thinking it was World War I and you were on Mars.

After an afternoon break the team scrimmages. It is during one of these run-throughs when I am playing defensive back that I take a sharp blow to the head. A thunderstorm has broken out. My helmet flies off, and after colliding with a couple of other guys making a tackle, I hear a loud pop. I look down to see a crimson stream running down my jersey. My nose is bleeding.

I refuse to come out of the game. It isn't because I am so tough. It is more because I'm not. Despite my fear and weakness, in that moment I know that I have become part of something larger. It is a signal to my friends (and any girls who might be watching) that I am willing to bleed and suffer for our tribe, as a warrior does in battle. I stand there bleeding in the rain, being baptized, as I see it, to a cause greater than myself.

Deep in my adolescent soul I understand that men need to be tested and wounded. As my dad has already explained, they need to take a blow, to bleed for the tribe or the team. Ritual male wounding is a part of every culture and is vital in transforming boys into men. It signals the end of childhood and gives cosmic meaning to a man's life. The way to do that at Prep and other American high schools is to prove yourself on the football field.

At the same time, I hear my father saying it's important not to suggest that boys who read poetry, create art, or speak philosophically are somehow weak or unmanly. At Georgetown Prep we are taught that a well-integrated man can be an athlete, actor, poet, and philosopher. In fact, having all those things in the mix

is a sign of moral health.

We need our art, and we need our bloody noses. Young men who are not properly initiated can suffer from psychic dissonance, depression, rage, and a lifelong inability to handle relationships. Rites that provide for the initiation of young men into the world of adulthood are as crucial to male health as fresh air and food. The Sioux Indians would drive a skewer through an initiate's pectoral muscles and raise him by ropes until he fainted. In Ethiopia young men have to prove their worth by jumping over cows. In America there are still subcultures like surfing and skateboarding, where a would-be member has to prove himself, often by scrapes, wipeouts, minor injuries.

These kinds of tests are considered primitive in our modern liberal culture that frowns on masculinity. The result is a culture that eschews violence of any kind except in simulated form, creating boys who can dazzle in video game play but can't hit a fastball.

It's August 10, 1983, and I've just parked on the street in front of Georgetown University. I am going to see Father Hart, who is living at the Jesuit house for the summer. Then I am going to look at some records at Kemp Mill Records on Wisconsin Avenue. This cute girl Eva works there. I met her when I was shopping there a couple weeks ago. She knows a lot about music.

After that I'm going to meet Brett, Squee, Shorty, and some of the other guys and girls at this bar called the Fish Market. It serves these huge beer schooners and has a great sound system and dance floor, although they play mostly Top 40 crap like Journey and Phil Collins.

I wear a Georgetown Prep T-shirt and khaki shorts, really the first time this year that's possible. It's spring. I have to hand in to Father Hart my final paper about The Road Less Traveled, which we had to read for a class on human sexuality. The class was taught in two sections, one by Father Hart and the other by Mr. Bent. I'm so glad I did not get Mr. Bent. He was always talking about masturbation and the penis and the vagina and handed out readings from Betty

Friedan and Cosmo magazine and even an article from Playboy. Don't get me wrong, I love Playboy. I just think it's kind of weird having it in school. Mr. Bent has a bad complexion and greasy hair and, like I said, I'm glad I got Father Hart instead. We read *The Road Less Traveled* and some of Pope John Paul II and even got to listen to and interpret love songs.

So I go to see Father Hart at Georgetown University. I give him my paper, which he tucks away in his room and then returns. We go up on the roof of the Jesuit residence and sit on a couple chairs. It's a beautiful day and we're overlooking the Potomac River. We order some sandwiches and a couple of Budweisers. Father Hart has a mini boom box and puts on George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass*.

I'm kind of sad, thinking I won't be seeing him again now that he's at Georgetown and I'm going to be working all summer and then going to college across town at Catholic University. I brought my skateboard with me and my boom box. Driving down Canal Road I listened to this amazing new album, *Synchronicity*, by the Police. That and U2's *War* and Bowie's *Let's Dance* and Billy Squier's *Don't Say No* are my favorites right now. I have them all on cassette, along with R.E.M.'s *Murmur*, Jimi Hendrix, George Harrison's *All Things Must Pass*, and some Elvis Costello and AC/DC. Father Hart says that there's a nice roof on top of the Jesuit dorm and that we can hang out up there and cool some burgers and listen to music.

I want to be a writer, like Tom Wolfe and Hunter Thompson and Joan Didion and the other writers I found in the magazines in my brother's closet. I want to write about pop culture in general, but mostly I want to write about music. That would be the best job ever, writing for *Rolling Stone* or covering music for the *Washington Post*. Like Cameron Crowe, that guy who's my age and who wrote *Fast Times at Ridgemont High* and writes for *Rolling Stone*.

Going through old copies of *Rolling Stone* and *Creem* in my brother's room I found this amazing writer, Lester Bangs. My favorite piece is his review of the Van Morrison album *Astral Weeks*. When the album came out in 1968, Bangs says, he was deeply depressed, "nerves shredded and ghosts and spiders looming across the mind."⁹⁵ Then he writes this: "In the condition I was in, [*Astral Weeks*] assumed at the time the quality of a beacon, a light on the far shores of the murk; what's more, it was proof that there was something left to express artistically besides nihilism and destruction."

In Astral Weeks “there was a redemptive element in the blackness, ultimate compassion for the suffering of others, and a swath of pure beauty and mystical awe that cut right through the heart of the work.” This was a tonic, wrote Bangs, because “the self-destructive undertow that always accompanied the great sixties party had an awful lot of ankles firmly in its maw and was pulling straight down.”⁹⁶ In another piece, Bangs made this observation: “There’s a new culture shaping up [in 1970], and while it’s certainly an improvement on the repressive society now nervously aging, there is a strong element of sickness in our new, amorphous institutions. The cure bears viruses of its own.”⁹⁷

Bangs writes this about the song “Madame George.” It’s a song about a transvestite, but there is nothing vulgar about it—it is about the humanity of even the strangest of us. “The beauty, sensitivity, holiness of the song,” Bangs writes, “is that there’s nothing at all sensationalistic, exploitative, or tawdry about it; in a way Van is right when he insists it’s not about a drag queen...it’s about a person, like all the best songs, all the greatest literature.” Bangs then goes on a magnificent digression about the problem of seeing the miracle of each human life, and how doing so can almost be too much to bear:

As I write this, I can read in the Village Voice the blurbs of people opening heterosexual S&M clubs in Manhattan, saying things like, “S&M is just another equally valid form of love. Why people can’t accept that we’ll never know.” Makes you want to jump out a fifth floor window rather than read about it, but it’s hardly the end of the world; it’s not nearly as bad as the hurts that go on everywhere everyday [sic] that are taken so casually by all of us as facts of life. Maybe it boils down to how much you actually want to subject yourself to. If you accept for even a moment the idea that each human life is as precious and delicate as a snowflake and then you look at a wino in a doorway, you’ve got to hurt until you feel like a sponge for all those other asshole’s problems...You stop feeling. But you know that then you begin to die.⁹⁸

One of the things that I noticed after I read Bangs’s Astral Weeks piece was its similarity to the thought of the Catholic pope John Paul II. Bangs’s emphasis on the personhood of Morrison’s Madame George and the degradation of the S&M clubs (modern liberal life in a nutshell), reminded me of something.

Then it came to me—it was similar to something John Paul II had written in 1968, the year *Astral Weeks* was released. In a letter, the future pope wrote,

I devote my very rare free moments to a work that is close to my heart and devoted to the metaphysical sense and mystery of the person. It seems to me that the debate today is being played out on that level. The evil of our times consists in the first place in a kind of degradation, indeed a pulverization, of the fundamental uniqueness of each human person. This evil is even more of the metaphysical order than of the moral order. To this disintegration planned at times by atheistic ideologies we must propose, rather than sterile polemics, a kind of ‘recapitulation’ of the inviolable mystery of the person.⁹⁹

“Did you see *Gandhi*?” Father Hart asks me. We have this deal where I will go see the movie *Gandhi* if he will listen to *Synchronicity* by the Police.

“I’ll rent it this weekend. Have you listened to *Synchronicity*?”

“I’ll get around to it. I saw Sting on TV the other night, and I fear he’s been slipping on the Ring lately. We all know what happens to those who use the Ring.”

“They turn into Gollum.”

“I’ve been listening to the Moody Blues,” he says. “I used to love to listen to them in the 1960s. Their new album *Long Distance Voyager* is quite good.”

“Do you know what synchronicity is?”

“It’s that Jungian idea, right? About two supposedly different things happening that actually are related? Like there are no coincidences?”

“Yeah. He uses this metaphor comparing the darkness behind suburban life to the Loch Ness monster.”

He chuckles. He likes that one. “There’s something sinister in Reagan’s America,” he says.

“I don’t know if I’d put it on Reagan,” I say. “The hippies and the liberals aren’t much better. Look at what you guys from the 1960s left us. Acid, amnesty, and abortion.”

He knows I got that from Spiro Agnew who used it to criticize George McGovern.

“Jung’s stuff is mostly no good,” he says. “It’s very occult and New Age. He does have some interesting concepts, particularly about anima and animus.”

“What’s that?”

“Anima is female energy and animus is male energy. Jung thought that in order to be psychologically healthy a person needed both. In other words, a man needed some anima and a woman some animus. Men need to be fierce and strong but also like art and music and poetry. Women should be feminine but also have some toughness.”

“The ones I know definitely do,” I say. “We wrote about some of them in the last issue of The Unknown Hoya.”

“Yeah, I saw the last issue The Unknown Hoya,” he says. “It’s a bunch of crap.”

I’m insulted. “What’s crappy about it? We wanted it to be like Rolling Stone or National Lampoon. It’s laughs and gags and satire and some real reporting. We covered Mr. Maud’s bachelor party.”

“If you’re trying to be like Rolling Stone, you missed the mark. You guys are a bunch of brew-heads. It’s a bunch of nonsense about girls and keg parties and a profile making the one Dallas Cowboys fan at the school look like a jerk.” We had published a picture of Larry, the one Dallas Cowboys fan on campus, picking up trash after their loss.

“We did some good reporting. There’s even some advice in there.”

“The best place to use a fake ID is not advice. It’s crap. I mean, do you want to be Tom Wolfe or do you want to be Don Rickles?”

“Why not both?”

A plane goes overhead, coming in low over the university and heading across the river to National Airport.

“I see some anarchic spirit in there that has potential,” Father Hart says. “If you guys would stop talking about keg parties.”

“Even Chesterton talked about drinking beer.” I light up a cigarette.

“Not two hundred in one night. You better be careful about the drinking. It’s easy to lose control of that.”

“Are you happy being a priest?” I ask him, wanting to change the subject.

He thinks for a few seconds. “Yes, I am. Although I can’t say there haven’t been times of struggle. We all have our own pain; it’s as individual as our names.”

“I don’t really get the Eucharist. What is it supposed to be? They never really got around to teaching us about it. It was just kind of always there.”

“It’s the body and blood of Christ. The living Christ. The ‘Cosmic Christ.’”

“That’s the Teilhard de Chardin stuff, right? I heard my dad talking about that. He’s that heretical priest that talks about evolution.”

“He’s not heretical. You should read his stuff. The Cosmic Christ is not outside the universe but is the love baked into its evolutionary center. Science and evolution are the holy materials of the cosmic plan that has unfolded over billions of years and will continue to unfold over billions more. It’s a part of our births, our lives, and our deaths, and it will transform us into something greater, more loving, more beautiful. At the quantum level everything in the universe is connected. ‘We emerge out of this long, cosmic process we call evolution. But evolution is about deep relationality.... We are created for love, and that’s what keeps pulling us onward.’”¹⁰⁰

“Wow. And you’re giving me shit about Synchronicity.”

“The ‘Omega Point’ is what we’re moving toward. It’s the goal of everything. Total love, total acceptance, and total union with God.”

“My dad says that rock and roll has become the poetry of modern life. I think

David Bowie had read T. S. Eliot. They both talk about the problems of modern love.”

I consider bringing up sex for a second, but then I decide not to. It would be too weird. Father Hart is kind of an integrated person, like my dad and his colleagues. He’s cool and in shape, but he also has like a feminine side.

H. L. Mencken nailed this almost a hundred years ago in his 1918 book *In Defense of Women*. Mencken argues that women have an intelligence that is especially aligned with eternal and divine truths. They are less violent than men, more willing to negotiate peace with each other, and more attuned to the eternal nature of events like weddings, birthdays, and baptisms.

“In so far as [men] show the true fundamentals of intelligence—in so far as they reveal a capacity for discovering the kernel of eternal verity in the husk of delusion and hallucination and a passion for bringing it forth—to that extent, at least, they are feminine, and still nourished by the milk of their mothers,” Mencken writes. If you find an intelligent man, Mencken concludes, he will have a “streak of woman” in him: “Bonaparte had it; Goethe had it; Schopenhauer had it; Bismarck and Lincoln had it; in Shakespeare, if the Freudians are to be believed, it amounted to downright homosexuality.”¹⁰¹

After we eat, we say goodbye. I’m supposed to be meeting the gang. I ride my skateboard down to the record store, gliding down N Street. I know that the two beers I had at lunch are going to turn into more. I’m actually thinking of blowing off the record store and just going to a bar; it’s around three o’clock and happy hour will be starting soon. Part of me kind of wishes we didn’t get beers with the sandwiches. Alcohol used to level out just right; it calmed me down and made everything kind of snap into perspective. Now it’s hard to stop. I get to the point where things are cool and everything looks good, but then I just have to keep going.

Kemp Mill is just a couple doors down from Martin’s Tavern, one of the oldest restaurants in Washington, so I won’t have far to go.

I come in and Eva is there, a pretty girl with dark curly hair. She has on a Smith T-shirt and blue jeans. She’s like rock and roll attractive, strands of hair falling in her face but not too much, friendly but also smart and even a little tough. A cool chick.

She recognizes me, and I can kind of tell that she's happy I came by. There are rows of record bins and lines of albums displayed along the top of the shelves. Prince, Eurythmics, Madonna, Michael Jackson. My eye lands on this really cool-looking album, Avalon by Roxy Music. The cover is like a picture out of a King Arthur story, with a warrior seen from behind looking out over a misty landscape.

"That's a great record," Eva says.

"Is it as good as the Police? Have you heard Synchronicity?"

"Synchronicity is good," she says. "Roxy Music is a little different; it's like more sophisticated."

"I love the cover," I say. "It's like The Once and Future King."

This song comes on over the store sound system, this fantastic, angular, and cosmic wave of guitars and this beautiful voice that's full of longing. Eva sees me kind of freeze.

"It's 'Charlotte Sometimes,'" she says. "The Cure. It's a single."

"I want it," I say. "I'll take that and the Roxy Music."

"Listen," she says. "If you like the Cure, they play them at this club, Poseurs, that's right on M Street. I'm going there tonight if you want to meet later."

"Sure."

I pay for the records along with copies of Rolling Stone and Melody Maker and go next door to Martin's. It's a beautiful spring evening, the disk light soft and golden as the lights come on in Georgetown. I sit outside and order a shot of bourbon to sip on and a beer. There's this hilarious story by Alan Jones in Melody Maker about Ozzy Osbourne's shaking a piss on the Alamo and then getting arrested. Also a good review of Synchronicity.

I think about what Father Hart said about anima and animus. Am I integrated? Do I have the right balance of male and female in me? As I sit there getting drunk and just kind of being in the present moment, feeling the flow of people around me, I decide not to go meet Brett and Tommy and the girls at the Fish

Market. There's too much animus there. I'm going to meet Eva and listen to the Cure.

It's June 10, 1985. I'm addicted to alcohol and R.E.M.'s album *Fables of the Reconstruction* is releasing today.

Rock and roll is the last stage of artistic modernism in America. It's also the crazy phase of my alcoholism. I go to bars every night and am hung over almost every day. I sometimes wake up in apartments I don't recognize, with women whose names I don't remember. I see my Prep brothers in the summer, but not much of Brett. I think he is interning somewhere on Capitol Hill and studying for law school at Yale.

It's the 1980s. Bands are embracing different sounds, employing reggae, synthesizers, odd tempos, and other experimentation that relied on prepunk artists like David Bowie as well as the modernist artistic aesthetic that predated rock itself. We are still in the postpunk years. As critic Simon Reynolds would put it, "Those postpunk years from 1978 to 1984 saw the systematic ransacking of twentieth-century modernist art and literature. The entire postpunk period looks like an attempt to replay virtually every major modernist theme and technique via the medium of pop music."¹⁰²

Bands from Cabaret Voltaire, who borrowed their name from the Dada movement, to Talking Heads "tried to deconstruct rock even as they rocked hard." Lyricists absorbed the science fiction of William S. Burroughs, J. G. Ballard, and Philip K. Dick. The record cover artwork of the period "matched the neomodernist aspirations of the words and music, with graphic designers like Malcolm Garrett and Peter Saville and labels like Factory and Fast Product drawing from constructivism, De Stijl, Bauhaus, John Heartfield, and Die Neue Typographie."¹⁰³

A modernist masterpiece at the time is *Murmur*, R.E.M.'s 1983 debut. Driven with propulsive punk energy even as it seems to beautifully float in space, the record alters my consciousness during the summer I graduated from high school.

Suddenly the Who, Zeppelin, and the Stones are tired old men. We reject the past and the silly hippie utopianism that ended in Altamont. As the band Talk Talk sing, "Tomorrow Started." Talk Talk is genius.

I am living in a mouse- and roach-infested shithole in Arlington, just a short walk from the Key Bridge. I get drunk almost every night at a bar in Georgetown. My summer job in between semesters at Catholic University is washing dishes at the National Geographic cafeteria. My roommate Scott has decided not to go to college. He bartends at a popular spot in Georgetown.

Our crib, a tiny one bedroom, is mostly trashed, with empty beer cans all over, mouse droppings in the kitchen, and old copies of the Washington Post piled in corners. There is one pristine area: the space across from the sofa where we keep the stereo system. It's a classic Technics setup that I had spent an entire summer saving up for. It has fantastic sound.

We have an intense next-door neighbor. Jon is a cool black guy around thirty who is friendly but has one sore spot: his ex-wife. He wound up in this shitty run-down apartment building because his woman cleaned him out after the divorce. Jon had his phone service cut off, so he will occasionally bang on our door and ask to use ours. He greets us calmly and politely, then transforms into a cyclone of rage when the person on the other end picks up. That BITCH has RUINED HIS LIFE and this is SOME BULLSHIT that he can't even PAY HIS GODDAM PHONE! He then hangs up and thanks us. Occasionally, Jon will drop a dime bag of weed on the coffee table as a solid.

I wash dishes all day, do some writing to send to magazines like Rolling Stone and Playboy (they never bite), then go to the bar to hang out with Scott at work. Afterwards we come back to the crib and spin the great artists of the day: Tears for Fears, Sade, New Order, the Replacements, OMD, Prince, Talking Heads. I meet girls and sleep with them. Most of my Prep friends are at college. Brett is at Yale, although I hear he is also working on Capitol Hill in the summer. We see each other in the summer when we get together with the guys for baseball games, cookouts, whatever.

R.E.M. is always in heavy rotation in the apartment. The release of Fables of the Reconstruction, the band's third album, is an event. Scott is working the lunch shift and I am off, so we can build the entire day around the release. It's a beautiful summer afternoon in DC when I walk across Key Bridge in my

Birdwell shorts and Sunshine House T-shirt, gliding over to Kemp Mill Records on Wisconsin Avenue in Georgetown where Eva works. The winsome rituals people recall about record stores really are true. They are places of happiness, community, and fun.

I find my copy of Fables, then I head down to Scott's bar. "You get it?" he says. I hold up the ugly brown cover—R.E.M. has always had ugly covers. Scott gives me a thumbs up. I stay for a beer or two or three. I feel bliss.

I walk down to Dupont Circle and spend the afternoon at the Philips Collection, where I had gone with Caitlin back in high school. Degas, Picasso, Monet. I think about how to become immortal through art.

After a couple hours I head home. It's time for the listening session.

Scott is there and cracks a couple beers as I unwrap the LP and lower it onto the turntable. Just then there is a bang on the door. Jon! He has to use the GODDAM PHONE because THAT BITCH is FUCKING UP HIS LIFE! After a few minutes of dialed-up rancor, he thanks us, drops a dime bag on the table, and disappears.

We settle in and light up. I feel both like I'm dying and that the future is mine.

It is January 10, 1990. I go to an AA meeting.

It's October 2, 1993. A group of us are gathered at Hank Dietle's Tavern in Maryland. It's our tenth high school reunion. Dietle's is a little one-room beer joint next to Georgetown Prep. It somehow survived the buildup of shops, gas

stations, bookstores, and malls over the decades and retained its grubby vibe, featuring, as the sign says, “cold beer” and small musical acts that play country and folk music.

Me, Brett, and a bunch of the guys are meeting here before walking over to campus to celebrate our tenth anniversary. We didn’t frequent Dietle’s too much in high school, preferring the glamour of Georgetown or the fun of the beach. But now that the guys have wives and kids, the mellower pace at Dietle’s is appealing.

Wanting to be a journalist like my father, I have always adhered closely to his John F. Kennedy liberalism, which was the dominant ideology among the writers in Washington, New York, and elsewhere. But in the last two years my political thinking has undergone a revolution. I’m sober now, and I’m reading authors who are challenging my left-liberal assumptions.

In his best-selling book *The Culture of Narcissism*, Christopher Lasch, a brilliant social historian, argues that, whereas once people thought of politics as a way of addressing material needs and setting public policy about a common worldview and philosophy, it is now being used to address the deep emotional and psychological problems of a populace that is no longer entering into adulthood.¹⁰⁴ Robert Bly’s *Iron John: A Book About Men* has opened my eyes to the archetypal drama of male psychological development and how our culture stifles this natural and necessary process. I have even picked up *Right from the Beginning* by former Nixon aide Pat Buchanan, a populist firebrand (and fellow Catholic) who is considered “too extreme” by many liberals but who makes a lot of sense to me.

At our reunion, I talk to Brett—always more conservative than me—about my surprising conversion, about how the old liberalism has curdled into something nasty and intolerant.

“I’ve chosen the dark side,” I say. “I’m reading Pat Buchanan.” Brett just looks at me. “Frankly I don’t know if he’s conservative enough.”

Brett laughs.

Fletch, who is standing next to me holding a Budweiser, speaks up. “Judgie, are you becoming a conservative?”

“I think so,” I say. “Although I think it may just be old-school liberalism.” I feel like I’ve been accused of being a necromancer. I can tell that Fletch, the libertarian, doesn’t like the idea.

“You know,” he says, “there are still laws on the books criminalizing oral sex. If you’re going to be Pat Buchanan, you should launch a crusade about that.”

I try to engage Brett in a conversation about politics, but he’s not going to bite. Whereas I have always been emotional, demonstrative, and mercurial, he has always been calm, analytical, sensible. He’s probably not sure if I’ll be a Hindu next week.

“Hey Judge,” he says. “Guess what was on TV last week?”

“Pat Buchanan?”

“The Eddie Brown run.”

It was October 25, 1976. Brett and I had both been at the game at RFK Stadium. The Redskins were playing the Cardinals, each team fighting for a spot in the playoffs. In a pouring rain, late in the game after a St. Louis touchdown, punt returner Eddie Brown ran back a kick in what to me is still the greatest return in NFL history. Evading tackles in the mud and rain, almost going down several times, Brown just kept driving to the end zone until he broke the goal line and collapsed in exhaustion. I still remember hugging my father as we both jumped up and down in the stands. Like the 1983 Super Bowl or the Kenny Houston tackle against Dallas or the 1924 World Series (which my grandfather, a professional baseball player, had played in), it was part of DC sports lore and a touchstone for me and Brett.

He’s successfully gotten me off the topic of politics.

“One of the greatest runs in history,” I say. “It was right at a point, rain coming down, the field a mud bowl, the Cardinals just having scored, when it looked like the season was over.”

“Yeah,” he says. “It’s always important to stay in the game no matter what. It’s important to not give up.”

I nod. “Even if you’re surrounded.”

It's 1998 and I'm arguing with Brett about Monica Lewinsky. Actually, it's not an argument—it's me talking. We're at Café Deluxe, a casual DC restaurant. There's a bunch of us from high school, like thirty people, men and women, talking and laughing and eating burgers and fries. I'm sitting next to Brett and letting him have it about Lewinsky. He is working for Ken Starr, whose probe into some financial shenanigans made by Bill Clinton has taken a turn into a feverish investigation into an affair the president had with an intern named Monica Lewinsky.

"Why are you involved in that nonsense?" I ask him. The entire Lewinsky thing is absurd to me—the losers in the media are obsessing about sex in the Oval Office. All Clinton had to do was apologize and have Lewinsky accept the apology. That, or dump Hillary and stay with Monica. That second option always struck me as a decent one. It makes more sense as time goes by and Hillary gets more rancid and shrill while Monica gets sexier and more gorgeous.

Brett doesn't answer, just smiles and shakes his head. Since the day we met we've been opposites, me gregarious, even obnoxious, wearing my heart on my sleeve. Brett taciturn, shy. Because he has moved up in political circles, we don't see each other much anymore. When we do I'll needle and joke with him about his political life, but he will just laugh and not really engage with my points.

It's like that with Lewinsky. I can't believe this stuff is actually going on.

I'm drinking nonalcoholic beer, something Brett and everyone else is glad about. I've been sober since 1990. Brett has never been as outwardly emotional as me; he shows that he cares about you in quiet ways. He smiles and slaps my back when he sees that I'm drinking a nonalcoholic St. Pauli Girl. He's having a beer, but like everyone else there, we don't party the way we used to. There are kids and bills, and people have just one or two drinks before heading home.

I keep after Brett about Lewinsky: "I can't believe the world has shut down because of some fucking affair!" I say. "This is millions of dollars spent to chase down some guy cutting a slice."

Brett shakes his head. “You don’t know what you’re talking about,” he says.

I keep at it. “Come on, brother! All Clinton has to do is apologize! Hillary is the real problem. She’s Lady Macbeth.”

“You don’t know what you’re talking about.”

That’s all I’m going to get out of him, at least about the Lewinsky topic. We can talk about books, movies, music—especially music—but when I pry into his political life he won’t let me in. He knows I have a big mouth and am an intense person—not to mention the fact that I’m a journalist. He won’t talk politics—at least if it’s about something serious like the impeachment of Bill Clinton.

Instead, I do an imitation of Pat Buchanan. “I am going to build a wall from Miami to San Diego,” I say, chopping my right hand the way Buchanan did during speeches. “I am going to make the pope the secretary of state.” Everyone starts laughing. Buchanan is not only a national political figure but also a panjandrum of the DC Catholic ghetto. His book *Right from the Beginning* details his years growing up at the schools that many of us and our parents attended—Blessed Sacrament, Gonzaga and Georgetown Prep, Catholic University and Georgetown University. Buchanan is also a figure of fun, easy to imitate, whose populist right-wing politics, the precursor to Donald Trump’s, are too far out even for those of us who admire him.

“There is a controversy roiling Georgetown University right now,” I say, leaning into the imitation and chopping the hand like mad. “They do not want crucifixes in every classroom. My friends, the crucifix will leave the classroom when they pry it from my cold, dead hands.”

Then I add the kicker: “My friends, I have no idea why Brett Kavanaugh, a boy of good Irish Catholic stock, is involved in this puritanical nonsense about Monica Lewinsky. We are Irish-Scotts people with blood running through our veins. Our women are hearty and we like to fuck.” Brett can’t help it. Like everyone else, he’s laughing.

It is September 12, 2001. The phone at home rings, an unlisted number. I answer. It's Brett. Someone was killed in the 9/11 attacks, and she had a name similar to my sister. Brett fears that it might have been her. I assure him it was not. He now works at the White House. I tell him to stay safe and we hang up.

PART THREE

■

THE DEVIL’S TRIANGLE

“‘Devil’s Triangle’?”

“Drinking game.”

“How is it played?”

“Three glasses...ever played quarters?”

“No.”

“...It’s a quarters game.”¹⁰⁵

In this exchange can be found the entire dynamic of the train wreck that was the Kavanaugh hearing. Rhode Island senator Sheldon Whitehouse was certain he had cornered Brett. Because Whitehouse believed the opposition research provided to the Democrats by Michael Avenatti, he believed that Brett and I were involved in gang bangs and drugging girls. When Brett tried to explain the meaning of our silly slang, it was obvious Whitehouse didn’t believe him.

For my part, I had no idea what “the Devil’s Triangle” meant. I had never heard the phrase before. It turned out to be a drinking game that some of my Prep brothers invented during a road trip. However, according to urban lore, the phrase can refer to a sexual threesome including two men and a woman. The oppo hit men accordingly conveyed to the politicians and the media that we had participated in drug-fueled gang rapes, for which we had developed a private code as though we were members of a secret society.

In reality, at least as I am using the term, the Devil’s Triangle denotes a sinister cabal of a different kind: the coordination between opposition researchers, Democratic politicians, and the media.

In *Spooked: The Trump Dossier, Black Cube, and the Rise of Private Spies*, journalist Barry Meier digs deep into this diabolical vortex. *Spooked* is loaded with complex detail, but the point comes down to this: with the rise of political spies and opposition researchers and the demise of reliable gatekeepers like honest reporters and editors, there are no guardrails in the media anymore. Anyone can make an outrageous and unfounded claim about anyone and, without any proof, the story can make it into the media.

Reporters use the information they get from the spies and oppo researchers to publish uncorroborated stories. Without being fact-checked or otherwise vetted, the stories are fed directly into the media bloodstream and from there broadcast to the public. Journalists and political operatives also help create stories that they then report on as if they were observers. They take an active part in manufacturing the stories that they then report as news.

One notable recent result of this corrupt system was the Steele dossier, a piece of garbage cooked up by the Clinton-paid oppo-research firm Fusion GPS. The now-discredited dossier claimed that then presidential candidate Donald Trump had conspired with the Russians during the 2016 presidential campaign to steal the election. It also claimed that he cavorted with Russian hookers in a Moscow hotel. The media went all in, making fools of themselves over “Russiagate” for four years.

Meier sums it up well: “Investigative journalists normally rely on court records, corporate documents and other tangible pieces of evidence. But the dossier took them down a very different path, one into the shadow lands of intelligence, a realm where documents don’t exist and where reporters often can’t independently confirm what their sources are saying.”¹⁰⁶

Former FBI director James Comey’s role in getting the Steele dossier story into the media handily illustrates how such things work in Washington. Since being commissioned by Fusion GPS in 2016, the shady and unverifiable document had been peddled to various security and media outlets for months. But none of them would touch it. Comey—an experienced DC bureaucratic operator—knew exactly how to get it done.

A 2019 Inspector General’s report would later blast Comey for creating a series of “private” memos of his briefings with Trump, in which he informed the president of the existence of the dossier, and then giving those memos to a friend

with instructions to leak them to the media.¹⁰⁷ The result triggered an independent counsel investigation into Trump's supposed ties with Vladimir Putin.

From USA Today: "Today's report documents how Comey brazenly violated federal and FBI policies regarding with his disclosures. Top FBI officials told the IG that they were 'shocked,' 'stunned,' and 'surprised' that Comey would leak the contents of one of the memos to a reporter."¹⁰⁸

The same Stasi-style playbook was used in promoting the Blasey Ford hoax against Brett. The same collection of spies, oppo researchers, and media goons who tried to ruin Trump now used the same tricks on Brett—and me.

On September 12, liberal Intercept reporter Ryan Grim wrote that Dianne Feinstein was arguing with Senate colleagues about whether to release a letter Ford had written to her describing the alleged assault.¹⁰⁹ In his book *We've Got People*, Grim describes how reporters themselves helped create the story that they then reported on. "Oftentimes reporters are the mosquitoes that carry the rumor from office to office in attempts to confirm it," he wrote.¹¹⁰ On September 7, five days before Grim's story ran, "several Democrats on the Judiciary Committee learned about it this way." One of those Democrats was Kamala Harris.

As previously noted, Grim also explained that Ford was no reluctant witness. The argument that Ford didn't want to testify "ignored that Blasey Ford had already taken repeated steps to come forward, had already told friends she planned to do so, had already come forward to two congressional offices, and reached out to the press, and was only asking for confidentiality until she and Feinstein spoke."

Ford, her oppo-research operatives, and the mosquitoes in the media had done their jobs. Grim admits as much: "Whether the allegations in the letter were true or not—or, indeed, what the precise allegations were—was its own story, and I didn't have it. But the fact that Feinstein was battling with fellow Democrats on the committee over the issue was a separate story. And that one I had."¹¹¹ Yes. Because the Feinstein "conflict" story had been manufactured by the press itself.

This is how the Stasi media operates.

By September 28, 2018, I thought at long last that the nightmare was going to be over. The Senate Judiciary Committee was going to vote on sending Brett's nomination to the floor of the Senate for a final vote. Once they did so, it would be over.

The first order of business was to call for a subpoena—of me.

Senator Richard Blumenthal spoke up first: "Mr. Chairman, I'd like to make a motion to subpoena Mark Judge as a witness before our committee.... Every one of us, I think, were riveted and powerfully impressed by [Christine Blasey Ford's] truth. We heard her provide details in that story that can be corroborated and other facts that can be uncovered if we hear from other witnesses who have very relevant, important knowledge of what happened to her on that evening in that room."¹¹²

In response, Judiciary Committee chairman Chuck Grassley read the letter I had earlier submitted stating that I had no idea what Ford was talking about. Blumenthal again began to argue, but Senator Orrin Hatch bluntly replied, "The answer is no."¹¹³

I was having a nervous breakdown, but once again it was Fletch who helped me through it. Because Fletch is a libertarian who hates politicians, I got an unvarnished play-by-play when he called to see how I was doing.

"Judgie—you watching this?"

"Of course."

"Jesus, what a bunch of losers. You see Blumenthal? Oily-headed motherfucker."

"What about Leahy?"

"A gasbag. Remember that Batman movie he was in? The Joker should have tossed him out the window instead of Maggie Gyllenhaal."

There comes a point when being acutely stressed or depressed takes a step into suicidal ideation. Driving down the street, you begin to look up at buildings to see if they are high enough to do the job. You scout where the fentanyl dealers are. Compounding it in my case was the thought that not only would the world at large not care, but my political enemies would be positively glad.

During the Cold War “Lavender Scare,” Senator Joseph McCarthy suggested that gay men were “susceptible to Communist recruitment” because they had “peculiar mental twists.”¹¹⁴ The great anti-Communist Whittaker Chambers did not like these reckless accusations, telling his friend William F. Buckley Jr. that McCarthy had no evidence for his allegations but “simply knows that somebody threw a tomato and the general direction from which it came.”¹¹⁵

This is an apt description of what was happening to Brett and to me. There was an assault at a party thirty years ago, but we didn’t know the when, where, or even who—other than with 100 percent certainty that Brett Kavanaugh was there. This is an exact reflection of McCarthyism.

This point was made during the height of the fiasco by Senator John Cornyn of Texas. As the Judiciary Committee was calling for my scalp, Cornyn brought up McCarthyism and its “cruelty, recklessness, indecency.”

That extends to Mark Judge. Isn’t it obvious what is happening here with Mark Judge? He has submitted a statement, under penalty of felony, saying that [he does not recall the allegations made by Ford].... He said, “I never saw Brett act in the manner Dr. Ford describes. I am knowingly submitting this letter under penalty of felony.”

So he says he has nothing more to offer. He’s submitted his statement under penalty of felony. But here’s the other part. He admits to being a recovering alcoholic as well as a cancer survivor. He said he struggles with depression and anxiety so much that he avoids public speaking. And our colleagues across the aisle believe that the appropriate course of conduct is to drag Mr. Judge into this circus-like atmosphere and to subject his battle with alcohol and addiction to public investigation and scrutiny and ridicule.

That is cruel. That is reckless. That is indecent.¹¹⁶

It was all of those things. But for an enemy of the Stasi, none of that mattered.

Things had now reached the point where senators were so angry with each other that they almost came to blows. Fox News states: “According to authors Carrie Severino and Mollie Hemingway, the anteroom [outside the judiciary committee] became ‘unbearably hot’ on Sept. 28, 2018, as lawmakers squeezed into a tiny corridor where squabbles became so personal, a senator would periodically suggest staffers leave the room.”¹¹⁷

“In the epic, hours-long fight outside the meeting room, fistfights nearly broke out,” Severino and Hemingway write in their book, *Justice on Trial: The Kavanaugh Confirmation and the Future of the Supreme Court*.¹¹⁸

The book reveals that “one senator told another that he wanted to wring his neck.” Also, “a staffer who was bringing lunch to her hungry boss found herself in the middle of the scrum, with Ted Cruz inadvertently standing on her foot and Sheldon Whitehouse spraying her with saliva as he debated a colleague.”¹¹⁹

“Many people told us it was the craziest thing they ever experienced in their time on the Hill,” Hemingway told Fox News. Hemingway said several things had made tensions boil over. Senators were being heavily influenced by staff, and the Democrats had refused to participate in committee calls. Senators refused to respond to roll calls, and one referred one of Brett’s accusers to a reporter rather than to the “proper investigative channels.”¹²⁰

There was also the decision made by the committee’s ranking member, Feinstein, to withhold Ford’s allegation for weeks before she appeared and testified in September.

Hemingway also writes that the hearings were using “stagecraft” to influence viewers. Ford wore a blue suit that Senator Mazie Hirono of Hawaii praised as a nod to Anita Hill’s outfit during Clarence Thomas’s confirmation hearings. Hirono also noted how “Ford’s attorney requested a ‘Coke’ for his client,” an “apparent reference” to a sexual allegation that Hill had lodged against

Thomas.¹²¹

After being denied, Democrats walked out of the meeting. They headed directly for the TV cameras, where Blumenthal once again began calling for my testimony, mentioning me by name three times.¹²² Kamala Harris barked that “this is a sham what is going on in there” and once again called for an FBI investigation “for the sake of our democracy.” Hirono babbled about there being “a cloud” over Brett’s head. Sheldon Whitehouse blasted the “sham process” and called Brett’s testimony “vengeful” and “partisan.”¹²³

At one point a group of hundreds of protestors, mostly women, stood outside the Dirksen Senate Office Building and chanted in unison, “SUBPOENA MARK JUDGE! SUBPOENA MARK JUDGE!”

Fletch saw it on TV and texted me, “Hundreds of women screaming your name Judgie. You dreamt about this in high school.” Then he added, “You realize that the reporting in the Unknown Hoya was more accurate than the Washington Post, right?”

Still, it was too late to delay Brett’s nomination moving out of committee to a floor vote—or so I thought. Then the unexpected happened. When the committee members took their seats to vote, Senator Jeff Flake of Arizona made a request for an FBI probe of “current allegations” against Kavanaugh.¹²⁴ Republicans said it would be up to the FBI to decide what allegations were considered credible.

Part of what had spooked Flake was a woman who confronted him outside an elevator in the Senate office building. “What you are doing is allowing someone who actually violated a woman to sit [on] the Supreme Court,” she yelled. “This is not tolerable. You have children in your family. Think about them.”¹²⁵ This woman turned out to be a professional activist who serves as co-executive director at the George Soros-funded Center for Popular Democracy. She holds the same position with the group’s activist arm, the Center for Popular Democracy Action. These facts were left out of many media reports.

When Flake crumbled, the Left rejoiced, not yet realizing that it had been taken in by a con job—not just by Avenatti’s crazy tales but maybe even Ford herself. CNN reported, “A separate Republican source familiar with the matter told CNN that the undecided GOP senators believe a key FBI focus should be on, but not

limited to, Mark Judge, Kavanaugh's friend who Christine Blasey Ford has alleged was also in the room during the alleged assault and is also named as a witness to other incidents alleged by Julie Swetnick. Judge has said he does not recall incidents alleged by Ford or Swetnick. Kavanaugh has denied allegations made by Ford and Swetnick."¹²⁶

After Flake called for a one-week delay so that the FBI could investigate the claims, I finally saw a little daylight.

I immediately put out a statement through my lawyer that I would gladly talk to the FBI. I had never said otherwise. The thing I wanted to avoid was a spectacle on Capitol Hill.

I went down to Biz's office near Dupont Circle to make the arrangements. I wanted to just get this over with, or die. Although her office was a bright, gleaming space with large windows and a nice staff, I never liked going there. I always felt like I was about to get swarmed by Stasi media flacks.

I had had a near miss just a few days earlier, when I had been at Biz's office answering questions that were sent from Senate investigators. The most startling question asked how I had lost my virginity. Apparently there was someone out in the world claiming that "in the context of a conversation about losing virginity" I had talked about how I lost mine. The claim was that it had happened in a group sex situation, which may or may not have been rape. Jane Mayer, the New Yorker reporter who fell hard for the Russia collusion hoax, went on MSNBC to tell the whole world that "while at Georgetown Prep" me and some friends had reportedly had sex with an unknown intoxicated woman.¹²⁷

I calmly told my lawyer the name of the girl with whom I had lost my virginity. This wonderful woman is a wife and mother now, and I can only assume she vouched for me because I never heard another word about it.

After answering I noticed someone just outside the office looking at me in a strange way. I guessed he was a mole who was there to tip off the media. I told Biz I had to leave right away and asked her where the back exit was. She laughed like I was being paranoid, but then she asked a colleague, a young woman, to show me out. The staffer offered to walk me to my car, which was a couple blocks away in a garage. I accepted. I figured there might be reporters waiting outside in the alley and that two people walking out might throw them

off if they were just looking for one man.

It worked. There was indeed a reporter at the back of the building, but he was a couple hundred feet away looking down at his phone. I pulled my baseball cap down tighter and drew a little closer to the female staffer. He saw us, then went back to his phone. I made it to my car. After I got home, Biz called me. “You escaped just in time,” she said. “About five minutes after you left the lobby was swarming with reporters.” Imagine that!

Now, a few days later, it was time to talk to the FBI. I sat opposite Biz while she talked to an agent on the other end of the phone. I assumed I would be whisked away any minute to the bureau’s DC office. Instead, she hung up and told me I would be interviewed in two days—on Sunday. I couldn’t believe it. The entire world was waiting for me to speak. I was delirious with exhaustion and felt suicidal, and I would have to wait two more days.

Driving home, I couldn’t help but feel that Washington, the city I grew up in and loved, had become dangerous and deadly. Places where I had lived, prayed, played sports, or fallen in love suddenly looked deserted, even sinister.

Passing through Georgetown I recalled a moment from the late summer of 1983. A group of us—me, Brett, Squee, Dylan, our girlfriends, and a few others—had gone barhopping. It was August and we were all about to go our separate ways, off to different schools around the country. Walking down the sidewalk after the last bar closed, we joked and laughed. Still, there was a touch of melancholy in the cool night air. Our time at Georgetown Prep was over. I looked at Brett and he said, “I love this city.” Now it had become a landscape ruled by the American Stasi and their minions in the press.

I collapsed on my bed and tried to sleep, but my psyche was swirling with paranoia and conspiracy theories and I was going down crazy mental rabbit holes. One of them involved a recent report in which two men had come forward and said that it was they, not Brett and I, who had an encounter with Ford. Senate Judiciary staff interviewed the men, although they didn’t identify them.¹²⁸ The story was reported widely in the media and then just disappeared. I kept wondering where the hell these guys had gone.

There were also crazy theories about Ford’s father, Ralph Blasey, who worked for the CIA. Some people were calling the whole thing an oppo hit orchestrated

by the CIA and the Deep State. But there was a problem with this theory: the Blasey family stayed conspicuously silent about Christine's allegations. A letter released publicly in support of Ford began, "As members of Christine Blasey Ford's family,"¹²⁹ but "wasn't signed by a single blood relative."¹³⁰ The Washington Post was able to contact Ford's father, who simply said, "I think all of the Blasey family would support her. I think her record stands for itself. Her schooling, her jobs and so on," before he hung up.¹³¹

According to Mollie Hemingway and Carrie Severino, reporting on the story a year later:

Privately, however, it appears the Blasey family had significant doubts about what Ford was trying to accomplish. Within days of Kavanaugh's confirmation to the Supreme Court, a fascinating encounter took place. Brett Kavanaugh's father was approached by Ford's father at the golf club in Bethesda where they are both members. Ralph Blasey "...went out of his way to offer Ed Kavanaugh his support of Brett Kavanaugh's confirmation to the Supreme Court, according to multiple people familiar with the conversation that took place at Burning Tree Club in Bethesda, Maryland. 'I'm glad Brett was confirmed,' Blasey told Ed Kavanaugh, shaking his hand. Blasey added that the ordeal had been tough for both families."¹³²

It wasn't just the emotional strain of being the target of a political hit that made the idea of talking to the FBI so fraught. It was the idea that the FBI itself may be corrupt.

On September 18, just two days after Ford broke her story in the Post, the Hill reported that President Trump was bent on exposing what he called a "corrupt" FBI.¹³³ John Solomon and Buck Sexton reported that Trump "said Tuesday he ordered the release of classified documents in the Russia collusion case to show the public the FBI probe started as a 'hoax' and that exposing it could become one of the 'crowning achievements' of his presidency."¹³⁴

It later would be revealed that Comey wrote seven memos summarizing his interactions with Trump and then sent one of them to a personal friend and lawyer, directing him to leak the contents to a New York Times reporter. The

leak resulted in the appointment of a special counsel to investigate the president.

As the IG's report later concluded, "The unauthorized disclosure of this information—information that Comey knew only by virtue of his position as FBI Director—violated the terms of his FBI Employment Agreement and the FBI's Prepublication Review Policy."¹³⁵

Then there was the ridiculous figure of Frank Figliuzzi. The former assistant director of the FBI, Figliuzzi was a fixture on MSNBC, where he served up left-wing concern porn about conservatives.

Right after the FBI probe was announced, Figliuzzi appeared on MSNBC with notorious liar and hack Brian Williams. Figliuzzi didn't have anything to say about Ford's testimony. He was too excited about us getting nailed by the bureau. "This is where the FBI shines when it is allowed to," he said. "Pagers have gone off, text messages are being sent, calls are being made. Everybody's been on standby. If you are in the Baltimore division that covers Georgetown Prep where Kavanaugh went to high school, if you are in the New Haven, Connecticut division that covers Yale, if you are in California where some of the accusers and survivors are, you are in action...tonight."¹³⁶

Another talking head on Williams's show was left-wing attorney Barbara McQuade. To her there was no doubt where the investigation should start: "The place that I would start with is with Mark Judge. This is the one person that Dr. Ford actually puts in the room when this alleged sexual assault occurred. And so talking to him could be so critically important. I know that he has submitted a letter saying that he doesn't remember this, but that's so different from having an FBI agent show up on his doorstep."¹³⁷

Given all this evidence of partisan corruption at the Bureau, I was naturally apprehensive about my interview.

At my request the meeting took place at the shiny new FBI building in Manassas, Virginia, about twenty miles outside of Washington. I arrived early,

before three o'clock, parked in a lower lot, then walked up to the main entrance. Just then, in the parking lot of a shopping center across the street, a van came roaring up and, when the driver caught sight of me, squealed to a stop. The media was here.

Biz showed up a few minutes later, driving a white convertible. It was Sunday, and the grounds were quiet. We went through security and were met inside by two agents, a man and a woman, who looked to be in their late thirties or early forties. The male agent informed me that the interview would last "anywhere between three and seven hours."

That was quite a wide swath of time. I later figured out that if an interview is shorter, it means you're telling the truth. The only reason it would stretch to seven hours is if you were lying. In other words, the FBI probably already knew the truth of whatever did or did not happen to Christine Blasey Ford. I was just there to confirm it.

My interview lasted three hours.

We sat around a table in an immaculate conference room. At the start I reiterated what I had been saying from the beginning: I had nothing to hide, and I had no problem talking to Ford herself, indeed I wanted to do so, anytime, with anyone she wanted in the room including the FBI. I just, hand to God and standing before Jesus, had no recollection of any party where she was there and Brett and I were drunkenly stumbling around forcing hapless women into bedrooms.

The agents started broad and drilled down to the specific. I described the party scene of the 1980s and my friendship with Brett. I described him as I knew him—a brilliant, somewhat nerdy and shy guy who loved sports and was a bit awkward around girls. I could not imagine him attacking anyone. They asked if I knew any guys in high school who were aggressive toward girls, and I said yes—both at Georgetown Prep and other places. They asked if I had ever drunk so much that I blacked out at parties. The answer was yes. However, I also explained that the nature of alcoholism is progressive. I wasn't stumbling around blind drunk throughout my four years at Georgetown Prep. I remember most of my experience there with love and fondness. While I had blacked out once or twice in high school, it didn't become a horrible nightmare until college.

Slowly over the course of three hours I began to develop my own theory.

Opposition researchers had looked into my life, found a crazy period in the mid-1980s when my alcoholism was at its worst, and tried to tie Brett into that era. The benders, the blackouts, the anonymous women—it was essential for them to put me and Brett together during that period.

There was only one problem. I was in Washington at the time, and Brett was at Yale in New Haven. We just never saw each other.

This would help explain Ford's changing dates. A July 6 text to the Washington Post stated that the incident occurred in the "mid 1980s"; Ford's July 30 letter to Feinstein said it occurred "in the 'early 80s'"; her August 7 polygraph statement claimed it occurred "one 'high school summer in early 80's,' but then she crossed out the word 'early.'" ¹³⁸ Why the constant changes unless she was trying to connect me and Brett at a specific time in our lives when according to my own published writings I was an acknowledged binge drinker?

When I was asked about my hanging out at DC's country clubs, I had to remind the agents that I was never a member of any club, nor was any member of my family. My parents thought they were elitist and corny.

I was also asked about my infamous summer job at the Safeway supermarket in Potomac. Ford had claimed that she had run into me there after the assault and that I looked "ill" with shame and couldn't face her. ¹³⁹ I never denied working at Safeway—I had written about it in my memoir. I just had no recollection of running into Ford there.

I also kept wondering about Monica McLean. According to the Wall Street Journal, Leland Keyser told FBI investigators that she was pressured by Ford's friends and allies to reconsider her initial statement that claimed she was unaware of evidence supporting Ford's allegations of sexual assault against Brett. Keyser told the FBI that following her initial statement, Monica McLean, a retired FBI agent and a friend of Ford's, advised Keyser to "clarify" what she had said. ¹⁴⁰ If true, this would amount to witness tampering.

This news came after CNN obtained a declaration by a man who said that "he dated Ford in the mid-90s." ¹⁴¹ The man wrote that he "witnessed Dr. Ford help Monica McLean prepare for a polygraph examination." According to her ex-boyfriend, "Ford explained in detail what to expect, how polygraphs worked and helped McLean become familiar and less nervous for the exam. Dr. Ford was

able to help because of her background in psychology.”

McLean denied working with Ford on how to handle a polygraph as well as charges of witness tampering. “I have never had anyone assist me with the preparation of any polygraph,” she told CNN. “Ever. Not my entry polygraph, not my 5-year reinvestigation polygraphs. Never. I am extremely angry he would make this up.”¹⁴²

McLean’s lawyer also issued a statement. “Any notion or claim that Ms. McLean pressured Leland Keyser to alter Ms. Keyser’s account of what she recalled concerning the alleged incident between Dr. Ford and Brett Kavanaugh is absolutely false,” David Laufman told the Wall Street Journal.¹⁴³

Laufman is a former DOJ lawyer who interviewed Hillary Clinton during the investigation into her private email server. He interviewed Clinton alongside former FBI agent Peter Strzok during the 2016 presidential election. Strzok was fired in 2018 after texts from 2016 expressing anti-Trump bias were uncovered between him and former FBI lawyer (also his lover) Lisa Page. The texts included Strzok’s assertion that the FBI would “stop” Trump from being elected.¹⁴⁴ In 2022, after the questionable FBI raid on Mar-a-Lago, Laufman spent a lot of time on Twitter and cable news calling for Trump’s head.¹⁴⁵

Toward the end of the interview, the stress finally got to me, and I started crying involuntarily. I was wrung out. I had had twenty-eight sober years and possessed what the Jesuits would call a “well-formed conscience.” I wasn’t trying to hide anything or protect anyone. I was willing and able to make amends for any youthful drunken antics. But the tactics of the Stasi, from Ronan Farrow’s phone call to whoever in the FBI had tipped off the media and was likely going to leak my interview before my car even left the grounds, were just too much to take.

Nevertheless, the FBI agents I spoke to were courteous, professional, thorough, and empathetic. As we were walking out the female agent did a half-turn and smiled at me. I think she knew that the entire thing was bullshit.

When the background check—Brett’s seventh—came back clean, a report from NBC News said that there was “euphoria at the White House.”¹⁴⁶ Liberal senators, of course, called the report a sham. It wasn’t. The best summation came from Republican Louisiana Senator John Kennedy, who said, “If you think this is about [liberals] searching for the truth, you ought to put down the bong. This

is not about the truth. This is about gamesmanship and power, political and politics. It's that simple." Kennedy added, "The FBI asked Dr. Ford's counsel to submit additional evidence, and they refused."¹⁴⁷

During the first week of October, when Brett still had not been confirmed, Michael Avenatti dramatically announced he had a witness who could corroborate Julie Swetnick's outlandish claims of multiple gang rapes at Catholic high school parties back in the 1980s.¹⁴⁸ This too was a lie. From NBC News: "Reached by phone independently from Avenatti on Oct. 3, the woman said she only 'skimmed' the declaration [that Avenatti had written for her]. After reviewing the statement, she wrote in a text on Oct. 4 to NBC News: 'It is incorrect that I saw Brett spike the punch. I didn't see anyone spike the punch...I was very clear with Michael Avenatti from day one.... I do not like that he twisted my words.'¹⁴⁹

Rather than report this news at the time, NBC sat on the story for several weeks. As Fox News reported on October 26:

NBC News is under fire for sitting on information that would have cast serious doubt on wild claims about now-Supreme Court Justice Brett Kavanaugh just when the unsubstantiated allegations were rocking the judge's confirmation to the high court.

Controversial attorney Michael Avenatti and client Julie Swetnick claimed last month Kavanaugh took part in high school gang rapes just as Kavanaugh was defending himself against a separate, uncorroborated claim. Avenatti connected NBC News with an anonymous woman he claimed could corroborate Swetnick's allegations, but instead [she] accused the lawyer of "twisting" her words. Still, NBC went with Swetnick's story without disclosing the exculpatory reporting.

On Thursday, nearly three weeks after Kavanaugh's confirmation, NBC News published an article headlined, "New Questions Raised About Avenatti Claims Regarding Kavanaugh," that detailed "inconsistencies" within Swetnick's claims. In the article, NBC News admitted the unidentified woman

repudiated the sworn statement Avenatti provided to the Senate Judiciary Committee on her behalf to corroborate Swetnick's claims.¹⁵⁰

Coincidentally, Swetnick had also once been represented by the law firm of attorney Debra Katz, who represented Christine Blasey Ford. From the CNN website on September 26, 2018: "Two sources told CNN that Swetnick filed a sexual harassment complaint against a former employer a decade ago and was represented in the matter by a lawyer from Katz's firm.... A source familiar with the matter confirmed that a lawyer at Katz's firm did represent Swetnick, but that it was not Katz herself. The source said Katz never represented Swetnick and that the firm did not refer Swetnick to Avenatti for representation."¹⁵¹

Finally, at long last, Brett was sworn in. I watched the ceremony on TV, recognizing Brett's parents and some faces from high school in the crowd.

When it came time to thank the people who supported him, Brett got a little choked up. "Cherish your friends," he said. "Look out for your friends, lift up your friends. Love your friends. I love all my friends."¹⁵²

In September 2019, Washington Examiner reporter Ryan Lovelace, author of the book *Search and Destroy*, revealed a video that to many explained the motivation behind Ford's performance. The video shows her attorney, Debra Katz, speaking to a group of the University of Baltimore's Feminist Legal Theory Conference in April. Katz flatly says that part of Ford's motivation for accusing Brett of sexual assault was political.

In the aftermath of these hearings, I believe that Christine's testimony brought about more good than the harm misogynist Republicans caused by allowing Kavanaugh on the court.... He will always have an asterisk next to his name.... When he takes a scalpel to *Roe v. Wade*, we will know who he is, we know his

character, and we know what motivates him, and that is important; it is important that we know, and that is part of what motivated Christine.¹⁵³

According to Lovelace, “[Ford]’s audience was not the Senate...but the American people. If they could be persuaded that Justice Kavanaugh was a predator, then they might not accept a future ruling by the five Republican-appointed justices altering the right to obtain an abortion established by *Roe v. Wade*.”¹⁵⁴

Early in the morning on June 8, 2022, twenty-six-year-old Nicholas Roske arrived in Chevy Chase, Maryland, with the apparent intent of assassinating Brett Kavanaugh and at least two other pro-life justices. As CNN reported, Roske “traveled to Kavanaugh’s home with a pistol, extra ammunition, a tactical knife and other gear, looked up terms like ‘most effective place to stab someone’ and ‘quietest semi auto rifle.’”¹⁵⁵ In one online conversation, Roske had declared that he was “gonna stop roe v wade from being overturned,” claiming that he would “remove some people from the supreme court,” according to a search warrant application from the FBI.

“Two dead judges ain’t gonna do nothing,” one message board user told Roske. “You would die before you killed them all.”

Roske replied, “Yeah but I could get at least one, which would change the votes for decades to come, and I am shooting for 3.”

Roske’s phone search history indicated that he had searched for “assassin skills,” assassin equipment, “how to be stealthy,” and the official names of the current Supreme Court justices. “According to court documents, Roske told investigators that he was upset over the leaked Supreme Court draft opinion overturning *Roe v. Wade* as well as the potential for Kavanaugh to help loosen gun laws in the country,” CNN reported. “Roske, according to investigators, said he decided to kill Kavanaugh after thinking about giving his life purpose.”¹⁵⁶

I wish I could say I was surprised, but anyone with any knowledge of the Left’s modern history knows that it often uses violence to further its aims.

In August 2012, Floyd Lee Corkins II entered the offices of the Family Research Council in downtown Washington and shot a security guard. Corkins pled guilty

to “charges of committing an act of terrorism while armed, assault with intent to kill while armed, and interstate transportation of a firearm and ammunition.”¹⁵⁷ Corkins was angry that the Family Research Council is against gay marriage.

In 2017, James Hodgkinson, a former campaign volunteer for Senator Bernie Sanders, showed up at Republicans’ practice for the annual congressional baseball game and shot Louisiana Congressman Steve Scalise, a congressional staffer, a lobbyist, and two Capitol Police officers. All of the victims survived, but Scalise was seriously injured.¹⁵⁸

These and other incidents of overt political violence against the Right were effectively buried by the media, which quickly deflected attention to the hateful and dangerous Republican Party. There were no Hollywood movies or TV shows, no streaming series on Netflix. In fact, the liberal media typically goes out of its way to suppress the truth about the Left’s proclivity for violence, preferring to focus instead on the supposed threat from a chimerical white nationalist movement. In this connection, we should recall that the East German Stasi, unlike the Nazis, worked closely with artists, writers, and entertainers to control what the people saw, heard, and thought.

Finally, on June 24, 2022, the Supreme Court overturned *Roe v. Wade* along with a related case, *Planned Parenthood v. Casey*. In *Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization*, Justice Samuel Alito wrote in his majority opinion, “We hold that *Roe* and *Casey* must be overruled. The Constitution makes no reference to abortion, and no such right is implicitly protected by any constitutional provision, including the one on which the defenders of *Roe* and *Casey* now chiefly rely—the Due Process Clause of the Fourteenth Amendment.”¹⁵⁹

Alito argued, “*Roe* was egregiously wrong from the start. Its reasoning was exceptionally weak, and the decision has had damaging consequences. And far from bringing about a national settlement of the abortion issue, *Roe* and *Casey* have enflamed debate and deepened division. It is time to heed the Constitution and return the issue of abortion to the people’s elected representatives.”¹⁶⁰

It was a shocker. And, of course, it seemed to validate the apocalyptic rhetoric of those who had opposed Brett’s nomination in the first place, along with that of Amy Coney Barrett, a devout Catholic with a large family who shares his pro-life views.

Brett and I never got into heavy political discussions, and we had never talked about abortion. So I had no idea how he was going to vote in any particular case. I had always just assumed he was kind of a middle-of-the-road Republican.

Then I realized something: Brett may very well be a middle-of-the-road Republican—it was abortion laws in the United States that were radical. Before Dobbs, the US, China, and North Korea were among only six countries in the world that allowed abortion on demand throughout pregnancy. The other three were Canada, Vietnam, and South Korea.

In response to the decision, angry and threatening protests ensued outside the homes of Kavanaugh, Barrett, and other conservative justices—protests that were encouraged and defended as appropriate expressions of political sentiment by Democratic members of Congress, despite being literally against the law. There were also violent attacks on pro-life pregnancy support centers across the country, conducted by a group that had the nerve to adopt the name “Ruth Sent Us,” as though the late Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg would have endorsed their extremist behavior. Once again, the Stasi media redirected attention away from the violence of the Left to the supposed violent threat from pro-life groups, who had just won the greatest victory in the history of their movement.

When the announcement came, the first person I thought of was Father Richard John Neuhaus, a brilliant priest and public intellectual. In 1990, Neuhaus founded the influential journal *First Things*, which he edited until his death in 2009. I became friends with Father Neuhaus in the early 1990s, when he read some of my writings and invited me out to dinner. He also ran some articles I wrote. One was about how much of postmodern art is too cowardly to engage with the splendor and passion of the world, or what Aldous Huxley called “the monster of the obvious.” I once told him that in high school I had been in a band called the Jesuits but now wanted to form a punk group called Neuhaus. He chuckled and said, “May you go from strength to strength.”

Neuhaus had marched with Martin Luther King Jr. in the 1960s and often referenced King’s idea of a “beloved community” where people love and take care of each other, provide for the poor, and work for peace and justice without prejudice or hatred. I loved him as a friend and as a brilliant man who reminded me of my own father. The two were of the same generation, and both were classical liberals who would not be convinced that abortion was anything other than the taking of a human life. Neuhaus was known as a neoconservative, but

when asked how he could oppose the Vietnam War, care for refugees, and be pro-life, he replied, “Because it’s the same fight.”

In a First Thing symposium that became the book *The End of Democracy?: The Judicial Usurpation of Politics*, Neuhaus and others argued that the courts were taking political decisions out of the hands of the people. In this regard he agreed with Justice Ginsburg, who, while being pro-choice, found it unfortunate that the abortion question had been removed from the political process. “My criticism of Roe is that it seemed to have stopped the momentum on the side of change,” Ginsburg once said, noting that she would have preferred abortion rights be secured gradually in a process that included state legislatures and the courts.¹⁶¹

I myself never wanted abortion to be completely outlawed; I just wanted the law to be less extreme, and I agreed with both Ginsburg and Neuhaus that it should be left to the people to decide on a state-by-state basis. Liberals would often bait me by asking if I thought our taxes should then pay for childcare and single mothers and free meals in public school. They weren’t sure how to respond when I answered yes.

When Roe was overturned, a fellow writer and friend named John Zmirak told journalists, activists, and preachers in the pro-life movement that they should thank me for the outcome, as the person who had saved Brett’s nomination. John had encouraged me to start writing again after the Kavanaugh hurricane of 2018, and he published many of the articles that have formed the basis of this book on his website *The Stream*. I owed John a lot.

Still, I wrote him an email asking him to ease up on the talk of my helping to overturn Roe. This was a fight that had gone on for decades, involving presidents, priests, journalists, and activists—everyone from Ronald Reagan to pro-life leader Lila Rose to the Rock for Life kids who handed out flyers at the Vans Warped Tour. I was only one person—and not a very pious one at that. I still had a box of Playboy magazines in my basement.

A few seconds later I got a reply. It was a proverb:

For want of a nail, the shoe was lost;

For want of the shoe, the horse was lost;

For want of the horse, the rider was lost;

For want of the rider, the battle was lost;

For want of the battle, the kingdom was lost;

And all for the want of a horseshoe nail.

He finished, "You were the nail."

PART FOUR

■

THE '80S ON TRIAL: APOLOGIA FOR A DECADE

My father, Joseph Ralph Judge, died on April 20, 1996. Six months prior he had been diagnosed with an aggressive form of cancer.

Dad had spent the last several years as senior associate editor of National Geographic. He was responsible for the text in the magazine, while his colleague Bill Garrett was responsible for the pictures. Dad didn't mind being an editor, but his first love was always writing, which he continued to do even after he moved into management.

On April 23, thousands of friends and family gathered at Our Lady of Mercy Church in Potomac, where my brother Michael gave a brilliant eulogy. An excerpt:

I am going to keep my remarks brief today because trying to do justice to the man would take volumes. Joseph Judge leaves us a life that in memory can only be wondered at. Newton swam through starlit seas of thought alone. My father, too, was a swimmer, but he invited us to swim with him. We will never forget those long evenings with him, full of laughter and argument and poetry and opinion, when the world itself unfurled in all its intricate glory between the back porch and the garden. He made everything interesting, from the architecture of a conch shell, to the reason why zebras and wildebeests gallop the savannah together, from the alchemy of handicapping the racing form to the decipherment of Linear B. Listen to the list: writer, journalist, historian, poet, painter, conservationist. The beauty, puzzles, histories, and miseries of this glorious world were meat and drink to him. Quite simply, he never stopped being curious, and that passionate curiosity illuminated and inspired all of our lives.

My father was a voyager, and he loved voyagers—those curious, passionate few who driven to plumb the depths of experience, cast off fear and ready the bark. Thus the joy, still reflected in his eyes twenty years later, at shooting the Colorado River, back then a dangerous business indeed, or sweating far into the brush in Borneo. He taught me the language that the trees speak at night when the wind blows just before dawn. He taught me to watch for the constellations that herald the seasons. He taught me to stand outside on Christmas Eve and smell the sharp, sacred air, and to wait with quiet joy through February's Lenten hush for the joy of Easter's spring, which dwelt wishing him in all seasons. He taught me to stand up, to fight his old enemies: mediocrity, ignorance, zealotry, greed. He taught me that this day, this hour, this life, is a gift, a gift to be deeply wondered at and thought about and not wasted.

My Prep brothers were also at the funeral, with my mother noting how they were all "immaculately dressed" and standing in a row together in the church. Many of them have kids of their own, but those kids will grow up in a world much different from ours—and my father's.

There were also my father's old colleagues, some of them present in person, some only in spirit. Like my father, these multitalented men defined for me what it meant to be well rounded, fully realized individuals. I think of them today as a veritable pantheon of masculine role models.

There was Howard LaFay, a large, hilarious man with wavy black hair cut short who wrote articles for the magazine about Leningrad, Trinidad, and Easter Island. He also wrote about Sir Winston Churchill's funeral, and he wrote a book about the Vikings. An amateur biblical scholar, LaFay covered finds at the ancient Syrian city of Ebla. The Washington Post's tribute writes, "In World War II, he served for three years with the Marine Corps in the Pacific and was wounded on Okinawa, receiving the Purple Heart Medal. After studying for two years at the Sorbonne in Paris, he was recalled to active duty and served as a captain during the Korean conflict."¹⁶²

There was Thomas Abercrombie. In 1957 Abercrombie was the first civilian correspondent to reach the South Pole. In 1965 he discovered the several-thousand-pound Wabar meteorite in the Arabian Desert. A few years earlier, in Cambodia, he outwitted an angry mob by convincing them that he was French.

In the 1980s, Abercrombie charted the unexplored frankincense routes across South Arabia. And in the 1991 National Geographic article “Ibn Battuta: Prince of Travelers,” he wrote about the year he spent traveling through thirty-five countries—from Morocco to China—in the footsteps of the fourteenth-century Arab explorer.

Abercrombie had visited all seven continents, and he saw everything, from the Empty Quarter to the megaliths of Easter Island. He traveled to Japan, Indonesia, Iran, and the Asiatic republics of what was then the Soviet Union. He visited nearly every country of the Middle East. Abercrombie converted to Islam in 1964.

He traveled by airplane (often as pilot), sailboat, canoe, sled, horse, mule, camel, yak. He sailed the St. Lawrence River, led a train of four hundred camels through the Sahara, and swam with Jacques Cousteau. He was famous for wrecking cars. He interviewed soldiers and diamond miners, farmers and fortunetellers, wandering nomads and Stone Age tribesmen, emirs and sheiks and kings. For emergencies, he carried wafers of Swiss gold as well as an AK-47. Like Hemingway, Abercrombie once took photographs while swimming in Lake Huron beneath a twenty-inch crust of ice for an article on winter fishing.¹⁶³

Then there was Luis Marden, the real-life most interesting man in the world. To list Marden’s accomplishments is to sound as if you are describing the lives of ten men, not just one. Born in Quincy, Massachusetts, in 1913 as the son of an insurance broker and a teacher, he never went to college. Hired by National Geographic at age twenty-one, he was a pioneer of underwater photography. He found the wreck of the *Bounty* and dove with Jacques Cousteau. His discoveries include an *Aepyornis* egg, discovered in Madagascar; the Brazilian orchid *Epistephium mardenii* (yes, named after himself); a lobster parasite that became a new species of crustacean; and the first report of underwater fluorescence.

Marden was a gentleman, a polymath, an adventurer, and he knew his French wines. He was friends with Jordan’s King Hussein and the king of Tonga. He spoke five languages. He wore a Brooks Brothers suit, a shirt of sea island cotton, and a silk tie. His house on the banks of the Potomac was custom-built for him by Frank Lloyd Wright. For someone who was so legendary, he struck me as being understated, even quiet—although I also knew he was a brilliant conversationalist and very funny.¹⁶⁴

These larger-than-life figures were held up to me as models from my earliest years. They represented an ideal of balanced and integrated manhood—“men in full”—embodying my father’s ideal synthesis of art, action, poetry, and passion. For them, as for my dad, being a man meant having wide, deep, and serious interests, a taste for taking risks, having adventures, and appreciating the mystery and beauty of the world. As such they reflect what has been lost in our supposedly enlightened modern era, in which male passion is suspect and the traditional masculine penchant for testing oneself in extreme situations is considered embarrassingly retrograde.

They also serve as a reminder that before political correctness and the #MeToo movement, before iPhones and the internet and Twitter and outrage culture, there was an understanding that beneath the veneer of civilization was something wild, dangerous, and joyful, a soul electrified with passion, sex and slapstick.

Compared to previous generations, kids today are less likely to have sex, drive, work, drink alcohol, date, or go out without their parents. A lot of this has to do with the advent of smartphones and social media. Kids these days are terrified that if they do something bold—or stupid—it will wind up on Facebook, YouTube, or Snapchat. In 2015, twenty-two-year-old pop singer Ariana Grande licked a doughnut, and it wound up on the Today show.¹⁶⁵

In the 1980s, we didn’t live in fear of our every action being caught on a cell phone or security camera and then posted on social media. You could go out on a Saturday night, drink beer, see a band, take a long walk by yourself, hit on a girl, toilet-paper a neighbor’s house, and speed on the way home. You could do all these things while remaining almost completely anonymous. By 2002 that became more difficult, and by 2012 it was damn near impossible.

Growing up in the 1970s and 1980s, there was room for the shadows of young people. I have a vivid memory of a night where a group of us were in a bar drinking—the legal age back then was eighteen—and around midnight we decided to make the three-hour drive to the Eastern Shore. We all quietly went back to our parents’ houses to pack. I still remember quietly stuffing shorts into a bag while my mother slept and my father snored just yards away.

In high school, and later in college, my friends and I would start the journey as soon as we finished our classes or punched out of our part-time jobs on Friday. We never thought to ask permission or wondered if our parents might be

worried. Showering, getting dressed in our coolest clothes, listening to departure music—there was a real sense of adventure and the unknown, of leaving the bland world behind, like Huck Finn and Jim drifting down the Mississippi on a raft. In a time before cell phones, going out to the beach was a long ride uninterrupted by texts or calls. The experience formed a kind of deep meditation. The professional world was not just lost for an hour of yoga or Pilates but completely abandoned for a lengthy, restorative journey. Often it changed you.

The point of all this risk and danger, ultimately, was to develop genuine happiness, tolerance, and virtue. Knowing your dark side helps one move more fully into the light—to accumulate the values of perseverance, humility, and unselfish love that lead to good choices, which lead to moral freedom, which ultimately matures into a well-integrated human being. Truly free people get to say “yes” because they’ve learned to say “no” to hundreds of bad choices.

When we’re young and our lust leads us to make a pass at a woman and we are rebuffed, or we get into a fight and are beaten, or we injure ourselves after a foolhardy daredevil move, the physical pain and feeling of humiliation more empathetically connect us with others and allow us to accept our natural limits. They help us grow up and accept ourselves as flawed human beings—as sinners, if you will.

In his bestselling book *Iron John*, which I read when it came out in 1990, the poet and men’s movement activist Robert Bly describes a point when a boy has to steal the key of his liberation from under his mother’s pillow.¹⁶⁶ In fact, both boys and girls need, at a certain point, to assert their independence and embrace the dangers and risks of the real world. Kids locked away in their rooms, under the sheets, eyes glued to their iPhones, will never get near Bly’s key.

Today’s porn- and outrage-saturated media, and our inability as a culture to deal with the ambiguities of male sexuality, lay at the heart of the Kavanaugh imbroglio. My videos and writings were interpreted to indicate hostility toward women when they in fact express love, healthy masculine desire, and a deep appreciation for their mystery, power, and beauty. You’re not really allowed to

be in awe of women anymore. It's all interpreted as hate.

But it wasn't just me and Brett who were on trial. It was the entire era in which we grew up. An era of robust cultural confidence when men and women were equally celebrated, the 1980s have now in the rearview mirror become fodder for our modern media scolds.

For instance, several journalists noted during the hearings that I had written in praise of Hugh Hefner, who is now considered a symbol of toxic masculinity. This in turn was taken as evidence of my retrograde sexual attitudes and projected onto Brett as proof of his being unfit for a seat on the nation's highest court. What a crock of bullshit. The farther away I get from it, the angrier I feel.

For the record, my view of Hefner is equivocal. Hefner helped usher in the age of pornography, which is now a serious global problem that warps healthy and romantic sexual interaction. His grandiose claims about being a revolutionary are often hyperbolic, even silly. He's also a terrible dancer.

And yet an honest man cannot completely dismiss him. Hefner in fact made the case for a type of man who is increasingly rare these days, who may indeed be disappearing in the era of #MeToo and weaponized sexual politics. Playboy, whose first issue was published in December 1953, defended the man who is urbane, intelligent, interested in art, literature, music, and architecture—and who loves women. Indeed, I would argue that Hefner didn't always strictly treat women as sex objects. The Playboy man was educated, employed, and well dressed, and he could entertain a young lady at his modern bachelor pad for an evening of conversation about Nietzsche, Picasso, and jazz, culminating in mutually satisfying sex.

Hefner's magazine rejected the rugged outdoorsman type celebrated in most men's magazines of the 1950s. He also criticized some of the counterculture of the time, rejecting the "noise" of rock and roll in favor of sophisticated jazz. The "Playboy Man" loved capitalism and disposable income, and Playmates from the early issues were photographed in tasteful ways, with their personalities and accomplishments frequently celebrated.

Yes, it was an exploitative nudie magazine. But it was also a long way from the charmless, ruthless porn of today. Old issues of Playboy, which published some of the best writers of the time, from Gore Vidal to Norman Mailer, read like

Shakespeare compared to the Maxim mouth breathers that now represent a huge swath of the male population.

Hefner was also countercultural. As the entire country was getting married and moving to the suburbs, he defended spending a couple extra years in the city, driving a cool car, going to museums, reading great books, and buying the latest Dizzy Gillespie records. He created the kind of cool, urban bachelor who has all but disappeared in today's world of niche personalities and interests. Men today are either frat bros, comic nerds, yuppie suits, IT geeks, or sulky, epicene hipsters. Nobody covers as much ground as Hefner anymore.

Hefner could have settled down with one woman and still stayed the man he created. Yet he was tripped up by sex, the very thing that made him rich and famous. Instead of making male sexuality something to be indulged with aplomb but not recklessness, Hefner made it a lifestyle, walking around all day in his trademark silk pajamas and red robe with a blonde on either arm. And that's why he eventually became something of a joke. The journalistic quality of Playboy started dropping in the 1980s, and today it reads like a slightly more appealing issue of Details. The Playboy Mansion, Shangri-La in the 1970s, now seems gauche and tacky.

In the Kavanaugh battle, the movies of the 1980s also came under particular scrutiny and criticism. In films like *The Wild Life*, *Ferris Bueller's Day Off*, and *Risky Business*, teenagers have wild adventures that their parents don't know about. From the perspective of today's puritanical academic and media scolds, these rowdy and rambunctious movies appear licentious and libertine. In reality they taught us important lessons about what it means to be adults. In short, they were essentially conservative.

Risky Business, a Tom Cruise classic, tells the story of Joel Goodsen, a Chicago teenager who gets in over his head when he foolishly hires a prostitute named Lana and rolls his dad's Porsche into Lake Michigan. Joel then turns his parents' home into a brothel to pay the bills. Liberated from the suffocating control of his parents—particularly his mother—Joel cuts loose and discovers his hidden talent for entrepreneurial risk. At the climax of the film, an interviewer from Princeton shows up and decides that the staid university could “really use a guy like Joel.”¹⁶⁷

No, this doesn't seem like spiritually fortifying Christian entertainment. But

there is much more to *Risky Business* than the press thought—then or now. In her essay “‘Risky Business’ and Brett Kavanaugh, 35 Years Later,” published right after Brett testified, New York Times writer Ginia Bellafante offers the liberal view:

In the film, Tom Cruise’s character is admitted to Princeton despite an entirely middling academic record when he impresses his interviewer by turning his parents’ nicely appointed suburban colonial into a brothel while they are away. More clearly than any other film of its period, *Risky Business* hinges the privileging of male mediocrity on the exploitation of female disadvantage.¹⁶⁸

In other words, Joel is an exemplar of white male privilege.

In one sense Bellafante is exactly right: In the beginning of *Risky Business*, Joel is mediocre. His father is a passive figure who wants his son to get into Princeton but has no Jungian animus. Who does have it is Joel’s reckless friend Miles. Miles’ animus, however, is not honed and directed as with members of the military or a strong preacher but is unformed and volatile. He tells Joel, “Every once in a while you have to say, ‘What the fuck?’” Joel then hires Lana, and after an exhilarating week of partying, his life begins to unravel.

But in the original script, Joel doesn’t get the girl, doesn’t get into Princeton, and breaks a crystal egg that is his mother’s most prized possession. In short, writer and director Paul Brickman saw Joel’s story as a tragedy. Brickman described himself as a fan of J.D. Salinger, whose *The Catcher in the Rye* explored a young prep school kid having a mental breakdown.¹⁶⁹

Hollywood executives weren’t having it. They wanted Joel to get the girl, fix the house, and go to Princeton. Producers wanted the film to close out with a happy dialogue between Joel and Lana as they walk through the park hand in hand. “Time of your life, huh kid?” she says. Brickman was appalled: “I felt the whole film was compromised by this cheesy happy ending. I came very close to walking off the film.”¹⁷⁰ Brickman was so bitter that he did not direct another film until 1990. It’s amazing that Hollywood producers, who excuse all kinds of sex, violence, and bloodshed in the name of realism, hide from the reality that spiritual devastation can result from sin.

Still, there is a scene just before the sunny ending that bears Brickman's mark. Joel and Lana are on the top floor of a tony Chicago restaurant. Joel asks Lana whether her sleeping with him, and all the rest, was really just a set up. She says no, but it is not convincing.

The idea of a privileged white teen from suburban Chicago getting set up and played by a prostitute doesn't fit into the imagination of Bellafante and the rest of the liberal media. Joel's being a victim is just not possible.

Another emblematic film that was evoked by the Kavanaugh drama is *Fast Times at Ridgemont High*. Known mainly for Sean Penn's hilarious portrayal of a wasted stoner who has pizza delivered during class, the film became a huge hit and a cultural touchstone. In the audio commentary of the 2021 Criterion Collection reissue, director Amy Heckerling observes that the teens in the movie were, like teens at the time, "little adults." She noted that while the kids struggle with issues like sex, abortion, and drugs, most of them also have jobs.¹⁷¹ It seems like about half the scenes in the film take place with the characters at work, and the closing credits show the places where they all have jobs shutting down for the night.

What gives *Fast Times* its energy, even decades later, is that the characters are young but negotiating a grown-up world. "It's about sex when you don't know what you're doing yet, and work when you don't know what you're doing yet," Heckerling says.¹⁷² The characters are uneasy adolescents, wanting but failing to sound like experts about everything. The cast is outstanding, and many went on to become huge stars: Penn, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Judge Reinhold, Forest Whitaker, Phoebe Cates, and Nicolas Cage. One big surprise: Leigh, who plays the innocent Stacy Hamilton, pushed harder than anyone for the film to contain explicit sex and earn an X rating.¹⁷³

But while *Fast Times* is remembered today for its edgy themes, not to mention a nymphlike adolescent Phoebe Cates coming out of a pool in a bikini, viewed today the lessons of the film seem conservative, even heartwarming. While it does deal with sex and drugs, it doesn't have the cynicism of *Risky Business* or the nihilism of a film like *River's Edge*. Especially in light of today's strangling woke guidelines, *Fast Times* represents a genuinely free vision—and also, ultimately, a decent one. Leigh's character wants to lose her virginity and picks the wrong guy to do it with, but in the end she chooses the nice guy who wouldn't sleep with her but genuinely loves her.

These movies, like many others of that time, explored the creative, sexual, and dangerous side of the adolescent psyche. People once knew that to suppress the shadow would be to deny a part of our humanity. (There was a way to go too far, but it was reserved for truly horrible things—like Norman Mailer stabbing his wife at a party.) This was particularly understood about actors, athletes, and entertainers, who have to tap into extreme emotional places for their craft. We looked the other way when they stumbled out of night clubs or got caught with prostitutes.

Back in 1985, Washington Redskins running back John Riggins got tanked at a black-tie dinner and drunkenly approached Supreme Court Justice Sandra Day O'Connor, telling her to "loosen up."¹⁷⁴ Reading the play-by-play of this incident from our limp and arid safe space of 2022 is like viewing glamorous pictures of a sexy, colorful Cuba before the Communist revolution. From USA Today:

"I had been with a good friend, had a few beers, didn't bother to eat, went down to the hotel where the party was, walked in and, God I don't know why, because I hardly ever drink it, I had a double scotch. And I had another." —John Riggins

Riggins approached his table, where he was seated with governors, magazine editors and, of course, a Supreme Court justice. Riggins saw Virginia Governor Chuck Robb. "Gooo-be-na-too!" he said, according to Robb. "I understand that we're going to be seated at the same table tonight!" The dinner began....

"I continued to drink my dinner." —Riggins, who refused food.

"There were two bottles of red wine and John, in a very expressive mood, managed to mow both of them down. So they brought two more bottles of red wine, also within John's reach, and [he] somehow managed to knock them over. So, at this point, the table is covered with red wine." —Robb...

O'Connor was about to leave because she had an early commitment the next morning. Riggins approached O'Connor's seat, put his arm around her husband, looked over at the first female justice in history and uttered the famous line, "Come on, loosen up, Sandy baby, you're too tight."...

"Then he squatted and was staring off into space. He was really out of it. Then he dropped to one elbow, then he was flat on the floor. I knew he was under my chair when his cowboy boots hit my shoes." —Jill Cohen, guest at nearby table

"He just went back without a sound." —Robb... "They left him there through the whole speech [by Vice President George H.W. Bush.]"...

"People checked Riggins a couple of times during the show to make sure he was breathing." —Guest Marin Allen¹⁷⁵

The Redskins star slept for forty-five minutes. Then he got up and went home.

No cops. No lectures. No rehab. No #MeToo moral panic. No hand-wringing on ESPN, invasion from TMZ, or buzzkill symposium on "Patriarchy and Privilege: The John Riggins Problem." Everyone, including Justice O'Connor herself, laughed it off. The Washington Post came up with one of its greatest headlines ever: "John Riggins' Big Sleep: He Came, He Jawed, He Conked Out."¹⁷⁶

I was in college in DC at the time, and I remember the main thrust of the city's reaction: let Riggins be Riggins. One cannot imagine such an incident being allowed to pass today.

One of the reasons I bring up the years after my father's passing, even though they were years when I rarely saw Brett Kavanaugh, is that I want to correct the record. Senators often depicted me as some kind of strung-out alcoholic passed out on a street corner. At the journalists' panel in Austin about Brett's confirmation, liberal attorney and frequent TV guest Joyce Vance claimed that Brett "threw his buddy"—me—under the bus by describing me as a lost addict, not just a regular Irish drunk.¹⁷⁷ Actually, I think Brett might have been trying to protect me, knowing that I was already under unbearable stress with the attacks coming at me every minute of the day. I think he was trying to call off the wolves.

In reality, the years after I got sober in 1990 were some of the best of my life. I went to the beach, took up swing dancing (which I wrote a small book about), dated several strong, intelligent, and beautiful women, and achieved the freedom to write what I wanted.

My journalism career also took an interesting trajectory.

In the late 1980s, I had taken an internship at the *Nation* magazine. The *Nation* was avowedly left-wing, but I was still a liberal and this venerable journal was considered a good place to start for a person like me who wanted eventually to move up to the *Washington Post* or the *New York Times*.

The most interesting and brilliant person I met there was Christopher Hitchens. Hitchens throughout his career was a fearless truth teller and inveterate contrarian, remaining staunchly a "man of the Left" while at the same time defending the pro-life position on abortion and even coming to the defense of President George W. Bush and the Iraq War, a position that was clearly a bridge too far for his soon-to-be-former friends on the left. He was also a great hater, writing scathing books about his various *bêtes noires* including Henry Kissinger and Mother Teresa.

I got to talk to Hitch on several occasions, and I will always remember the exchange we had about the punk band the Clash. It was at a cocktail party in DC, and I approached him to sell him on punk rock as a vital revolutionary force. I never forgot his comeback: "I don't know; I tend to think nihilism just breeds more nihilism." As much as I was impressed with him, he seemed to be pulling that reply out of his ass. The Clash was not nihilistic; the members were socialists who had a vision for what would make a better society.

During the Lewinsky affair, Hitchens refused to go along with the Clintonian campaign to assassinate Lewinsky's character. He was one of the few on the left who saw through the Clintons early on—and he hated them with a passion.

In February 1999 Hitchens filed an affidavit stating that Clinton toady Sidney Blumenthal had called him up and asked him to call Monica Lewinsky a “stalker.”¹⁷⁸ This was par for the course in terms of liberal messaging methods. Blumenthal was a past master at orchestrating such campaigns behind the scenes. Hitchens refused—despite being close friends with Blumenthal. Their falling out was appropriately played out in the media.

“Yesterday the friendship abruptly ended,” Lloyd Grove reported in the Post, “apparently another casualty of Clinton's scandal-ridden presidency—with news accounts that Hitchens had signed an affidavit challenging Blumenthal's sworn denials to the Senate that he spread defamatory stories about Monica Lewinsky. ... Hitchens, reached at home yesterday after a nervous appearance on NBC's ‘Meet the Press,’ predicted: ‘I daresay I'll be cut and shunned.’”¹⁷⁹

In Vanity Fair, Hitchens recounted what happened:

During the next few days, I was to see that the word “snitch” can be made to rhyme with Hitch. I think Geraldo Rivera was the first to make anything of it; anyway, the joke got a good workout. Indeed, only a couple of weeks after Rivera first got his laugh, Maureen Dowd recycled the gag in her waning New York Times column.¹⁸⁰

He went on:

A snitch, if you think about it, is supposed to be motivated by malice, cynical self-preservation, or hope of gain. You become a snitch by dropping an anonymous dime, by striking a plea bargain, by “naming names” to get yourself immunity, or by dumping a former associate to save your own skin. Nobody has made any such allegation against me. However, I here repeat my charge that the associates of Bill Clinton were actively, and with taxpayers' money, spreading

false information against truthful female witnesses. They sought to destroy the characters of these women by off-the-record briefings, and by underhanded denunciations. They snitched, in fact. In doing what I did, I testified against the authorities and not to them.¹⁸¹

Hitchens notes that in political Washington, the powerful often ask others to lie on their behalf—but in a subtle, underhanded way. Such pressure in my case was not subtle. I literally got phone calls and letters and emails threatening me with extortion if I didn't lie about my friend Brett. There was no confusing, at least on my end, where the true power lay. Ford, who was flown to DC on a private jet, had the media, the political Left, Hollywood, Saturday Night Live, and the publishing industry lined up behind her.

In hindsight, Hitchens's testimony provides a serviceable account of the creation and methods of the new Stasi media. Throughout the course of my later career, I would witness its rise to the heights of elite journalism.

In the late 1980s I was also writing for the Progressive. I wrote about war protestors, animal cruelty at the National Institutes of Health, culture and movies and censorship. During the height of the Kavanaugh madness, the Progressive looked back at the good leftist I had once been in an essay titled, "The Mark Judge We Knew." The piece highlighted some articles I had written, noting that in those years I had taken "a firm stand on the political left" and displayed "a concern for social justice, and a progressive vision for the world."¹⁸²

Thinking back today on what I wrote for the Progressive more than three decades ago, I'm struck not by how much my thinking has changed but by how consistent it has been. Back then I was against censorship and war and adored the arts and pop culture as life-affirming and freedom-loving signs of creative power. Rereading the articles, it's clear that my thinking about art has not changed. It's liberalism that has.

Sure, I'm no longer a socialist like I was when I interviewed leftist folk singer Billy Bragg for the magazine. Yet my review of H. L. Mencken's memoir *The Editor, the Bluenose, and the Prostitute: H.L. Mencken's History of the "Hatrack" Censorship Case* quotes the Sage of Baltimore as expressing something I still stand behind today: "Every censorship, however good its intent,

degenerates inevitably into the sort of tyranny that the Watch and Ward Society exercised in Boston.” Another book I reviewed, *Seeing Through Movies*, praised its criticism of the corporate takeover of Hollywood and of studios’ tendency to churn out garbage, making political points rather than creating art.¹⁸³ I have these same sentiments today, just from a different angle. The censorship that degenerates into tyranny is the cancel culture of the Left.

I had also been pro-life throughout my entire career. I grew up in an artistic, intellectual, tolerant, funny, and loving Irish-Catholic family that loved literature, movies, poetry, plays, and the visual arts. There was only one thing that separated us from our fellow liberals: the life issue. We were not holy rollers about it, but my father was very clear where he stood.

I still remember the nights when, with guests around the dinner table or on the back porch, things would turn silent or angry when the question of abortion came up. My father would be happily partaking in a free-flowing conversation of the latest novel, song, or hit movie or of politics when someone, usually a liberal friend of mine or my brothers and sisters, would mention abortion. Up until then our friend had probably been lulled into thinking they were in a safe space; after all, my dad disliked Ronald Reagan’s policies, was a globe-trotting journalist with a fierce and sometimes ribald sense of humor, smoked and drank, and loved football and Glenn Miller.

When our friend railed against those crazy right-wingers who were against abortion, my dad would stump them. “That’s a baby,” he would quietly say. “You can’t argue with the science.” Things would grow quiet, then tense. There would be counterarguments tossed out, but my dad would not budge. He would softly explain the science of conception, talk about sonograms, mention scientists he had interviewed for *National Geographic*. He was not some yahoo at a tent revival meeting. “This is,” he would softly say, “fact.” Our guest would be shocked: “But your dad is so cool!” “Well, yes,” we’d say. “Our dad is a pro-life John F. Kennedy liberal.” There used to be a lot of them.

The recent overturning of *Roe v. Wade* has me hoping that the world may soon witness the return of the pro-life liberal. The Left could stop pouring so much energy into a difficult issue and a cause that has dubious constitutional merit. The Right could turn its attention toward supporting single mothers and perhaps doing what I for years have been waiting for it to do: step outside the lucrative but limited culture-war battles and engage with and support the arts as well as

create it. The response to cancel culture is not just counterpunching, but creating the kind of questing, beautiful, and provocative art that Hollywood is too scared to attempt anymore.

It might seem like I am conflating two very different things, abortion and the arts, but in my personal history the two have always been linked. When writing as a young man for the Progressive and other left-wing outlets in the 1980s, the things that I found most crucial in life, that is to say the dynamic experiences of love, learning, and transformation through engagement with the arts, were all the province of the Left. This was because for decades liberals had built up an impressive infrastructure to support actors, directors, writers, and musicians. The 1980s, my years in high school and college, were fecund, exciting years for movies, literature, and painting in the West. My friends and I would meet in bars and salons and talk about the best new music and novels and what Andy Warhol was up to.

At many of these gatherings, politics would come up. Someone would denounce Ronald Reagan to a chorus of cheers. Often we would talk about abortion. To my shame I would sometimes go along, just to avoid conflict or ostracism. I kept my true feelings to myself. On the rare occasion that I expressed doubts about abortion, the reaction was swift and definite. You were out of the club. Considering what a lifeline books and music were to me then, it would have been a death sentence. Our favorite celebrities and rock stars were required to sign off on the dogma. Eddie Vedder scrawling PRO-CHOICE on his arm during a live concert was a kind of dark sacrament that you could not refuse. If you did, you became an outsider.

In the 1980s, artists could pursue their vision in a way that was so individualistic that it could cut past political pigeonholing. What agenda is *The Empire Strikes Back* pushing? Equal parts Joseph Campbell, California spiritual mumbo jumbo, and Saturday morning serial, the *Star Wars* series was the distinctive vision of one man, George Lucas. It would be impossible to do something similar today. Or would it? All it takes is some money and an adventurous spirit—the kind of punk rock, do-it-yourself, oddballs-accepted vibe that I loved about the 1980s.

In the fall of 2018, I got a call from an experienced Hollywood actor and producer. This person had been in a bunch of movies, including one with Johnny Depp. He was marveling that no one had expressed interest in making a movie about what had happened to me during the Kavanaugh fight: “This entire thing is

a psychological thriller that involves a flawed protagonist. You'd have to go back to the 1970s, to *All the President's Men* and *The Parallax View*, to make it."

Let's just say the rights are still available.

Another highlight of my writing career occurred in 1990, when I got to interview William Shawn, the legendary editor of the *New Yorker* from 1952 to 1987. I was then twenty-five and living in a row house in Georgetown with three other guys, two of whom had gone to Georgetown Prep, and was doing a story about a writer named Julian Mazor for a popular Washington weekly. Mazor had written several short stories for the *New Yorker* in the 1960s that were then published in a well-reviewed collection, *Washington and Baltimore*, whose best entries focused on nonracial reconciliation between whites and blacks. My father had introduced me to the stories, and they had deep spiritual and literary meaning for me.

Getting Mazor to talk to me had not been easy. A main angle of the piece was that Mazor was reclusive, a J. D. Salinger-type who avoided publicity. Weeks of phone calls had finally worn him down, and he had done the interview.

To finish my profile, I had to hear from "Mr. Shawn," as everyone at the *New Yorker* referred to him. The call came around 9:30 p.m. on a Friday. I remember the moment so clearly because Shawn was such a towering figure in journalism, and hearing his soft, gentle, polite voice on the other end was like receiving a blessing from the pope. The writers he had edited were a pantheon of giants: James Baldwin, J. D. Salinger, John McPhee, Lillian Ross, Pauline Kael, Joseph Mitchell, Calvin Trillin, Renata Alder. I mentioned the tremendous effect Mazor's story "The Boy Who Used Foul Language" had on me when my father gave it to me to read in eighth grade.¹⁸⁴ Shawn told me that Mazor's was a unique voice, unlike anything else he had seen at the time.

I wrote up the story and will never forget the day it was distributed all over Washington. I got congratulatory calls from friends and family—and from Mazor himself. He thought I had done a fair and honest job. He was particularly thankful that I had honored his request to keep off the record the stories he had told me about his friend Jerry Salinger.

I knew I had damn well better be accurate. It was a different time from 2018,

when the collapse of journalistic standards would allow Ronan Farrow of the New Yorker to call and basically accuse me of sexual misconduct without revealing the person, time, or place. Farrow's work was sharply and accurately called into question in 2020 by Ben Smith, former editor of BuzzFeed and now a media reporter at the New York Times. According to Smith, "If you scratch at Mr. Farrow's reporting in the New Yorker and in his 2019 best seller, *Catch and Kill: Lies, Spies, and a Conspiracy to Protect Predators*, you start to see some shakiness at its foundation."¹⁸⁵ Farrow, writes Smith, "delivers narratives that are irresistibly cinematic — with unmistakable heroes and villains — and often omits the complicating facts and inconvenient details that may make them less dramatic. At times, he does not always follow the typical journalistic imperatives of corroboration and rigorous disclosure, or he suggests conspiracies that are tantalizing but he cannot prove."

Smith itemizes examples of Farrow's not talking to key alleged witnesses in sexual harassment cases, subjectively interpreting events that those who write about see quite differently, and ignoring key facts. In one case, he relayed an allegation that an NBC producer had heard a story of sexual assault but never actually asked the producer in question. Smith: "Mr. Farrow and the fact checker never called the producer. And if they had, that element of the story would have been much more complicated—or would never have appeared in print."¹⁸⁶

Another story involved Michael Cohen, President Trump's former personal lawyer. In "Missing Files Motivated the Leak of Michael Cohen's Financial Records," Farrow suggests something suspicious inside the Treasury Department. An unnamed FBI employee had noticed that records about Cohen had vanished from a government database in the spring of 2018. Farrow quotes the anonymous public servant as saying he was so concerned about the records' disappearance that he leaked other financial reports to the media to warn the public about Cohen's financial activities.¹⁸⁷ Congressional Democrats and the media went crazy—Rachel Maddow called the story "a meteor strike"¹⁸⁸—and the Treasury Department promised to investigate.

Yet as Smith noted, "Two years after publication, little of Mr. Farrow's article holds up, according to prosecutors and court documents." The Treasury Department records on Michael Cohen never went missing. That was just the claim by the civil servant, an Internal Revenue Service analyst named John Fry who would later plead guilty to illegally leaking confidential information. Fry, his lawyer said, had been watching "hours and hours" of TV and was "a victim

of cable news.” He had leaked the information after seeing a tweet by Michael Avenatti, who in May 2018 demanded on Twitter that the Treasury Department release Mr. Cohen’s records: “Hours after Mr. Avenatti’s tweet that day, Mr. Fry started searching for the documents on the government database, downloaded them, then immediately contacted Mr. Avenatti and later sent him Mr. Cohen’s confidential records, according to court documents. Mr. Fry ended up pleading guilty to a federal charge of unauthorized disclosure of confidential reports this January.”

When asked about this and other problems with Farrow’s reporting, Smith got double-talk. “The best reporting tries to capture the most attainable version of the truth, with clarity and humility about what we don’t know,” Smith wrote. “Instead, Mr. Farrow told us what we wanted to believe about the way power works, and now, it seems, he and his publicity team are not even pretending to know if it’s true.”

Meanwhile, just as with the Cohen story, Avenatti seemed to be pulling levers behind the scenes in the Kavanaugh case.

In concluding his takedown of Farrow, Smith made this observation:

Mr. Farrow, 32, is not a fabulist. His reporting can be misleading but he does not make things up. His work, though, reveals the weakness of a kind of resistance journalism that has thrived in the age of Donald Trump: That if reporters swim ably along with the tides of social media and produce damaging reporting about public figures most disliked by the loudest voices, the old rules of fairness and open-mindedness can seem more like impediments than essential journalistic imperatives.¹⁸⁹

Mr. Shawn himself could not have put it better. It’s a disgrace to his memory that the New Yorker now seeks to align itself with fashionable causes by publishing the likes of Ronan Farrow.

In 1989 my career finally seemed like it was about to take off when I was invited to write for the Post.

As a kid, of course, I held the Post in awe. In grade school we went on a field trip to the paper, and I remember the monkish solemnity we observed entering the environs of 15 and L. To think that we were gliding down the same corridors trod by Woodward and Bernstein! Getting a call or a visit from the Post was like an audience with the pope. In the mid-1980s, my brother, a successful actor in Washington, won the Helen Hayes Award for the region's best actor.¹⁹⁰ Sure, the award was great, and so was meeting celebrities at the after party. But the next day he was on the front of the "Style" section in the Post. He had made it.

Then came the day in 1989 when I got an unexpected call from the Post. I was working at a record store and had written a letter complaining about an essay they had run. They liked my letter and wanted me to come in and talk.

I was twenty-five and being invited into the sanctum sanctorum of American journalism. I met with the editors of the "Outlook" section—the Sunday op-ed part—who invited me to write "about whatever you want." I didn't even feel my feet touch the sidewalk as I walked from the Post building to my dad's office a few blocks away for a congratulatory lunch.

David Ignatius, who was at the time the editor of the "Outlook" section—he's now a columnist for the paper—had announced that the Post should hire more "weirdos, misfits, outcasts," folks who had something interesting to say, who could add sparks to the paper. Of course, his advice went nowhere. I was told by one editor that the Post was an iceberg that moved in micromillimeters. They could talk about change all they wanted, but the template was set.

I did wind up writing several pieces for the Post, most often the "Outlook" section. Yet I became more and more aware of what the parameters were. I could write nothing pro-life, nothing too blatantly Christian, nothing about guns. Inevitably, I ran up against the liberal orthodoxy there.

It most strikingly occurred in 1994, when the "Outlook" ran, at full page, an op-ed essay of mine about saving the Howard Theatre, one of the oldest black theaters in America. I went into detail about its history; yet something strange happened to my copy when I got to the 1960s. I had referred in passing to the

“moral and cultural collapse” that had destroyed the Howard and its surrounding neighborhood—the drugs, rioting, and black racism that had brought down that part of town. The once-vibrant historically black neighborhood, known as Shaw, never recovered and has since become an economic sinkhole.

The night before the paper came out, I was called and told that the phrase “moral and cultural collapse” had been changed to the more euphemistic “social upheaval.” Note: this was an editorial in the editorial section.

I’ve been told by several people that I made a big deal out of what was a routine editorial decision. But for me, the Post’s changing my copy in this way caused a moment of personal crisis.

There had in fact been a moral and cultural collapse in Washington during the riots sparked by the murder of Martin Luther King Jr. How had I discovered this? By reading the reporting of the Washington Post itself. *Ten Blocks From the White House: Anatomy of the Washington Riots of 1968*, a book by black reporter Ben Gilbert and other Post staff, tells the story of the riots that erupted that summer. More than 1,200 buildings were burned at a cost of almost \$25 million. Many of the rioters were looters, criminals, and kids who, according to at least one witness, cared little or nothing about Martin Luther King—just as 2020’s black-masked anarchists (who were mostly white) cared nothing about George Floyd.¹⁹¹

It soon came to light that the rioting was not spontaneous at all but had been purposely instigated by a small group of black radicals intent on setting off an insurrection. They succeeded all too well—mainly at the cost of Washington’s black community itself.

After the smoke cleared, in August 1968, Gilbert put out word on the street that he wanted to meet the men who had sparked the conflagration. He got word back that the main instigator would meet him at an old DC hotel. When Gilbert arrived, three men were there. The men were hidden behind ski masks and announced themselves as Marxist revolutionaries. One quoted Che Guevara —“In a revolution, you either win or die”—while another called white people “the Beast” and insisted King was killed because he had fought against “colonization.” Today these men are probably tenured professors in one of America’s elite universities.

The ringleader explained that they had been planning violent action since February, two months before King was killed. They then described how they triggered violence after King's death. "A lot of areas we went into," said one, "there was nothing going on till we got there. But once we started things, man, people just took up." Using Molotov cocktails and dynamite stolen from construction sites, the men bombed stores, most of them white-owned businesses that served (the radicals would undoubtedly say "exploited") the historic black neighborhood. Once destroyed, of course, few of these businesses returned.

One of the men claimed responsibility for at least fifteen of the fires that destroyed parts of the city. He further explained that he had more than twenty-five men working with him: "There is organization. Don't you realize that, as I said, there's a revolution going on; there must be organization! That's the reason that it was not a riot but a rebellion! There is organization. You have your assigned districts that you work with."¹⁹²

"The crowds...generally were made up of bands of youth," the Post reported in 1968. "Some were schoolchildren, younger than ten years old; some were teenagers and twenty-year-olds—many dropouts or unemployed." A young black man at the scene put it more bluntly: "The death of Martin Luther King had nothing to do [with this]. It was an excuse to be destructive or clean up."

Today the Post, infected with the soft Marxism of identity politics, would never report so accurately.

The morning after King was murdered, Stokely Carmichael held a news conference, where he announced, "America killed Dr. Martin Luther King, Jr. last night...what it means is that we have gone full swing into the revolution." After his conference Carmichael went to a rally at Howard University, one of the oldest and most prestigious black schools in America. Howard stands proudly on a hilltop over black Washington, which at the time was burning. One reporter observed that "the tenor of the speeches was vehemently anti-white." The American flag was lowered and the flag of Ujamaa, a black separatist group, was raised.

After Carmichael spoke, something remarkable happened. The doors of Howard's Cramton Auditorium opened and a throng of immaculately dressed black men and women poured forth. They had been at a memorial service for Dr. King. The faithful had sung Brahms's "Requiem," the hymn "Precious Lord,

Take My Hand,” and “A Mighty Fortress is Our God.” The service ended with “We Shall Overcome.” As the mourners filed out, they came face to face with Carmichael. Here were two faces of America—the rage of the antiwhite radical and the dignity of the nonviolent Christian. Sixty years later they are still facing off.¹⁹³

The Washington Post in 1996 didn’t want that embarrassing bit of urban history to make it into my copy or anyone else’s. As I sat at my computer late at night, staring at my changed copy, I knew that I was facing a moment of truth. I could swallow their propaganda, submit to it as the price of being published. Or I could be free—and never write for the paper again.

Then I remembered something that had happened back in 1983, my senior year in high school. Fletch, myself, and the third guy who produced the Unknown Hoya had worked late into the night putting together a new issue. It was nearing midnight and we had spent hours cutting and pasting, interviewing people, and mimeographing pages at the American University library. I had ink on my button-down Oxford shirt and my clothes smelled like glue. I was exhausted, and as I trudged up to the front door I just wanted to fall into bed.

Just inside the door, sitting in his den off to the side, my father was still up. He was worried and irritated. I had been gone for hours and had school the next morning. What the hell was going on?

I had a fresh copy of the Hoya in my hand, and I handed it over. Dad took it, looked down at it, then slowly walked back to his desk. He sat down and began to read. Then his shoulders started to shake. He was laughing. The senior associate editor of National Geographic was chuckling at the Unknown Hoya.

So now, in 1996, when I was faced with the choice between a career producing bland liberal copy at the Washington Post or the thrill of doing fun, fearless, original writing like the kind we did in the Hoya, I vowed that I would never compromise again. Instead I would only write for places that would allow me a degree of real freedom—and that was not the Post.

The best outlet for this purpose at the time was the New York Press, a fantastic weekly tabloid edited by Russ Smith. Russ was the most tolerant and open-minded editor I ever wrote for. Shortly after my father’s death I had written an essay that I considered unpublishable called “Manifesto of a Right-Wing Rock Fan.” It

was just what the title described, an argument that being a conservative was not incompatible with being a rock fan—indeed, that conservatism was the new counterculture. Russ ran the piece unedited.

In the years after I abandoned mainstream journalism for a life on the fringes of the conservative media world, I pursued various side occupations. Perhaps my favorite job was working as a substitute teacher in a series of grade schools around Washington. I've always had a gregarious personality and kids have always liked me; a principal at a school I taught at told me, "You're genuine, and kids can sense that."

One school where I taught in the early 2000s was Saint Teresa, a Catholic elementary school outside Washington. The parish had a small graveyard next to it where F. Scott Fitzgerald was buried. Between classes I would go over and read the epitaph, which was the famous last line from *The Great Gatsby*: "So we beat on, boats against the current, borne back ceaselessly into the past."¹⁹⁴ My father and I had sometimes driven over to visit the grave. Dad of course had been a writer himself, something I had wanted to be. I even shared Fitzgerald's birthday—September 24.

One of the things I immediately noticed is how desperately male teachers are needed in schools. On my first day at Saint Teresa, walking down the hall for the first time, I noticed that the boys in the classrooms I passed were noticing me and—this is no exaggeration—going berserk. I was the only male teacher in the school, an athletic one at that, and the boys could not contain themselves. They literally jumped up and down, poured out of the classrooms, and climbed all over me. Recess was pandemonium. The boys bellowed with joy as I tossed a football in a high, beautiful arc across the playground.

Although I didn't have kids of my own, I tried to be a good role model for the kids at Saint Teresa. I told the boys to never hit girls and to be fierce but not aggressive. This is a valuable distinction drawn by Bly in *Iron John*. Aggression is negative, a destructive, counterproductive force. Fierceness is beautiful, a sharp and channeled defense of the things you love. In *Iron John* Bly uses

psychology, sociology, poetry, and history to argue that men have lost touch with themselves due to a lack of initiation at the hands of other men. This, he argued, was the result of two developments, one economic, the other cultural. First was the Industrial Revolution, which drew fathers away from home, leaving their sons all too often without positive role models. Second was feminism, which Bly thought was positive and necessary but also bled men of their fierceness.

The book caused a cultural firestorm when it was published in 1990. Feminists wrongly called it misogynistic—increasingly the go-to explanation for everything that feminists dislike about men and American society in general. Meanwhile liberals steeped in the ironic Seinfeld ethos rushed to parody the men's movement, depicting it as a bunch of sorry losers beating a drum in the woods in their underwear. The book was misleadingly tied in with the sappy New Age movement, even though in *Iron John*, Bly repeatedly mocks the "New Age man."

Fast forward thirty years. Everything Bly diagnosed as wrong with the culture remains true, particularly his negative assessment of what he termed "receptive maleness." Bly recalls the antiwar feminism of the 1960s, when there was a bumper sticker that read WOMEN SAY YES TO MEN WHO SAY NO—in other words, to men who refuse the draft. He is highly complementary of the women's movement, saying that it is a good thing that men learned to objectify women less: "The Fifties man was supposed to like football, be aggressive, stick up for the United States, never cry, and always provide." This resulted in "a psyche that lacked flow."

In the 1960s, men called for "harder" women who were more sexually free and aggressive about their careers, and women called for men who were more in touch with their feelings. But in the "receptive man" of the 1960s—and today—something is missing: "They had learned to be receptive, but receptivity wasn't enough to carry their marriages through troubled times. In every relationship, something fierce is needed once in a while: both the man and the woman need to have it. But at the point when it was needed, often the man came up short." Bly then uses a wonderful analogy. In the *Odyssey*, Hermes tells Odysseus that when he approaches Circe, the goddess of magic and a witch, Odysseus is to lift his sword, not in a threatening way but to show that he is unafraid and ready to confront her female power with his own: "Showing a sword doesn't necessarily mean fighting. It can also suggest a joyful decisiveness."¹⁹⁵ Many modern men, Bly argued, can no longer lift their swords.

Today, Bly's observations about the severe dysfunction that happens to men when they have not been properly initiated into manhood are even more timely and relevant. On TV, in books and movies, and especially in politics, men who are not receptive males are derided as delusional, weak, crazy, and dangerous.

In 2014 Seattle Seahawks defensive back Richard Sherman caused a scandal by acting fiercely during a football game. Sherman and Michael Crabtree, a wide receiver for the San Francisco 49ers, had bad blood between them. Sherman deflected a pass intended for Crabtree to win the game, and then he went on in effusive celebration and smackdown in the postgame interview: "I'm the best corner in the game! When you try me with a sorry receiver like Crabtree, that's the result you're going to get. Don't you ever talk about me." Female sports reporter Erin Andrews asked who was talking about him, and he replied, "Crabtree. Don't you open your mouth about the best, or I'll shut it for you real quick. LOB [Legion of Boom]!"¹⁹⁶

For some reason, this entirely understandable boast, uttered in the adrenaline-pumping moments after a championship game, was considered terrifying and perhaps even worthy of action. According to the Post, Fox commentator Michael Strahan told Sherman that he "about scared Erin Andrews to death," and then asked the athlete "to explain the emotional outburst." "I'm a competitor. I don't like people saying negative things about me," Sherman replied. "I don't like people running their mouth, so I told him, 'Good game and good try, but I'm the best corner in the league.'" ¹⁹⁷

I would only have added the following: if Erin Andrews was frightened by male athletes acting like male athletes, then she should not be covering men's sports. But then, I never thought, and will never think, that women should cover men's sports. It's tokenism that comes across as fake and forced.

Our culture has tried to eradicate what Bly calls "Zeus energy"—a male energy that "encompasses intelligence, robust health, compassionate decisiveness, good will, generous leadership."¹⁹⁸ The subsequent transformation of the Industrial Revolution into the Digital Revolution hasn't brought fathers and sons any closer. Fathers continue to be cowed by their enlightened feminist wives, and during the pandemic many caved to the excessive fear and anxiety of women, agreeing to lockdowns, masking, social distancing, even selling the family home and moving to Vermont.

Bly observed that many of the angry young political activists of the 1960s were actually taking over campus buildings and fighting in the streets because they were searching for their absent fathers.¹⁹⁹ This is even more true of gang members, many of whom have been raised in female-centered households and who often seek a sense of belonging to a hierarchically organized tribe dominated by violent alpha males.

I don't think it's an overstatement to say that the lack of male initiation in the modern world is responsible for problems from drug addiction to gun violence to the epidemic of male suicides.

I discovered this gaping hole in the lives of young men when around 2008 I made a little video about how to shave. I did it just to have some fun and because I had recently converted from disposables to safety razors, which are heavier, thicker, and last a lifetime. I videotaped myself shaving with one, then uploaded it to YouTube.

In a short amount of time it had gained over 200,000 views. Many of the comments were from young men who had no fathers to teach them how to shave. One young man called me his "YouTube dad." It was heartbreaking and indicative of a deep, unfulfilled longing in the souls of American boys.

It should be emphasized that being a strong man and a good mentor means standing up against bullies, whether those bullies are the American Stasi in politics and the media or those who attack gay and transgender people. You can be a strong man and defend not only women but also those who are marginalized and different. This is one of the things that was so awful about the Ford accusation. While I had my moments of idiocy, bad jokes, and putting my foot in my mouth, at my best I liked to believe I stood up for the weak and vulnerable. The idea that I would have terrified a teenage girl made me sick.

After working at Saint Teresa I got a summer job teaching journalism to high school students as part of a program at Georgetown University. I always showed the class two movies: *All the President's Men* (1976) and *Shattered Glass*

(2003). All the President's Men is, of course, the big bang of the modern journalism age, Woodward and Bernstein's harpooning of Nixon the story that launched a thousand journalistic careers.²⁰⁰ Shattered Glass tells the story of Stephen Glass, the fabulist who made up stories and got rewarded for it by credulous liberals at the New Republic.²⁰¹ That is, until he got caught. The two films taught students how to do good journalism and how not to.

I actually had a direct experience with Glass's habit of fabrication. In 1997 I attended CPAC, the annual conservative conference held at the Sheraton in Washington, DC. I was going to get a story for the New York Press. After the conference I called Tucker Carlson, who was then a writer for the Weekly Standard and other magazines. I was friendly with Tucker and wanted to get his take on where conservatism was headed in the Clinton years. "Hey, were you at CPAC?" he asked. I told him I was. "Did you see any drugs or heavy drinking or sexual assaults?"

I had no idea what he was talking about. I hadn't seen anything but conservatives giving speeches and hawking their books. Tucker pointed me to Glass's reporting, in which he describes how a group of four young male conservatives at CPAC conspired to sexually assault a woman:

Over the next hour, in a haze of beer and pot, and in between rantings about feminists, gays and political correctness, the young men hatch a plan. Seth, a meaty quarterback from a small college in Indiana, and two others will drive to a local bar. There, the three will choose the ugliest and loneliest woman they can find. "Get us a real heifer, the fatter the better, bad acne would be a bonus," Michael shouts. He is so drunk he doesn't know he is shouting. Seth will lure the victim, whom they call a "whale," back to the hotel room. The five who stay behind will hide under the beds. After Seth undresses the whale, the five will jump out and shout, "We're beaching! Whale spotted!" They will take a photograph of the unfortunate woman.

This is the face of young conservatism in 1997: pissed off and pissed; dejected, depressed, drunk and dumb.²⁰²

Glass's article, like so many others he wrote, would later be exposed as a fraud.²⁰³ Apparently the liberal playbook of trying to destroy conservatives with fake accusations of sexual assault goes back many years. But people were all too ready to believe it at the time, and the article remains a useful guide to the hateful prejudices that liberals project onto conservatives.

Meanwhile, increasingly in the 2000s, the Washington Post was resembling the recklessness and stupidity of Glass. The Post was changing and—especially after billionaire Amazon owner Jeff Bezos took it over—going hard left, becoming sloppy, hysterical, and rawly radical. Donald Trump eventually would drive them insane.

Len Downie Jr. was the editor of the Post from 1991 to 2008, and his memoir *All About the Story: News, Power, Politics, and The Washington Post* reads like an artifact from a different and distant epoch, when journalists were liberal but were not corrupt and duplicitous social justice zealots. Downie took over the Post after the retirement of legendary editor Ben Bradlee. Under Downie's leadership the Post won 29 Pulitzers, including three Pulitzer Gold Medals for Public Service. One of the most impressive stories was about the horrible conditions soldiers faced at Walter Reed Medical Center. The exposé led to real reforms.

Downie, a phlegmatic man, was born in Cleveland to parents who valued humility. He went to Ohio State University, a fact that made his Ivy League Post colleagues nickname him "Land Grant Downie." He was "addicted" to journalism from an early age, and had worked on his college newspaper. His parents taught him to be humble and to see both sides of an issue, a fact that Downie says accounts for his view that abortion is "a real dilemma."²⁰⁴ A lifer at the Post, he began as an intern in 1964 and worked his way up to city reporter, then to various upper-level editor spots, and finally to the top position.

All About the Story offers insight into the hard work of covering local stories as well as some of the most important historical events of the last fifty years: the assassination of Martin Luther King Jr., Bill Clinton's impeachment, the 9/11 attacks, and the invasion of Iraq. The weakest chapter is on the 1968 riots that destroyed large parts of Washington. Downie is perfunctory and superficial here, ignoring the radical nature of those who caused the destruction.

Of course, Downie spends a lot of time on Watergate, which turned the Post's reporters into movie stars and the Post itself from a small local paper into a rich

international one. The reporting of Bob Woodward and Carl Bernstein drove Richard Nixon from office, an event that made journalism seem like a sexy and dangerous profession and that filled newsrooms with generations of elite liberals and ultimately hard-core leftists of the kind that have lately been churned out in large numbers by liberal arts colleges and journalism schools. Social justice warriors out to change the world according to their lights—and willing to destroy anyone who stood in their way.

However, the person who comes off worst in *All About the Story* is not Nixon, but Hillary Clinton. Downie's dislike for Clinton is pungent. When in 1994 the paper began, in Downie's words, "pursuing significant questions about the relationship the Clintons had with the failed Madison Guarantee Savings and Loan Association in Little Rock, Arkansas, when Bill was governor," Downie and the first lady had a tense meeting at the White House. Clinton was irritated that the Post was reporting on the federal investigation into the Clintons and their deals in Little Rock, but she refused to turn over any documents related to the case. Downie would not back down.

Hillary then switched to the various women who were claiming to have had affairs with her husband—a kind of preemptive strike against their credibility. (She would also dispatch George Stephanopoulos to have lunch with Downie and try and kill the stories). After the meeting, Clinton began to spread rumors that Downie was out to get them and that he was jealous of Ben Bradlee. Despite being criticized by other journalists and liberal activists, Downie defends his coverage: "I strongly believe that we did what we should have done in holding the Clintons accountable for their behavior. Even as I write this, I believe that there remain significant unresolved questions about the veracity of both Clintons."²⁰⁵

Such a view was not permissible at the Washington Post in 2020. Under President Trump the media had a nervous breakdown. For some reason Trump, an abrasive, somewhat comical businessman from New York, had driven the press insane, rendering them incapable of seeing both sides of an issue, as Len Downie had. To the contrary, they were all in on the liberal anti-Trump narrative. And they changed their mode of operation accordingly.

In July 2016, the Post ran a piece by New York University professor Jay Rosen, who argued that Donald Trump made it necessary for journalists to abandon any posture of neutrality: "Trump isn't behaving like a normal candidate; he's acting

like an unbound one. In response, journalists have to become less predictable themselves. They have to come up with novel responses. They have to do things they have never done. They may even have to shock us.... they may have to call Trump out with a forcefulness unseen before.... Hardest of all, they will have to explain to the public that Trump is a special case, and the normal rules do not apply.”²⁰⁶

Jettisoning the normal rules in practice meant distorted and overheated reporting, selective editing, ignoring sources that would contradict the facts, sensationalizing a series of phony scandals, and embracing the Democrat narrative that Trump was a dangerous fascist and white supremacist.

In this effort the Washington press colluded nakedly with the national security apparatus that had tried to prevent Trump from winning and worked to destroy his presidency from day one. As Hill contributor Andrew McCarthy has reported, the former director of national intelligence, John Ratcliffe, “has declassified and released handwritten notes” that reveal “that ‘Mrs. Clinton approved her campaign advisers’ proposal to blame Moscow’s hacking of Democratic National Committee (DNC) emails on a conspiracy between Donald Trump and Vladimir Putin.’”²⁰⁷ As would come as no surprise to Downie, the Clintons were trying to divert the heat from their own shady dealings to others. And it worked.

Part of the Mueller probe into the Russian collusion allegations involved a story that ran in the Washington Post in July 2016. The headline: “Trump campaign guts GOP’s anti-Russian stance in Ukraine.”²⁰⁸ As Byron York points out in his book *Obsession*, the story was completely false—“not only wrong, but 180 degrees wrong.”²⁰⁹ The Post then reported that Russian hackers had penetrated the US power system through an electrical grid in Vermont, a preposterous story that was completely bogus.²¹⁰ At this point, the Post and the rest of the activist media are considered a joke, and that’s not hyperbole—people literally laugh at the mention of their names. Land Grant Downie got out just in time.

I conveyed all this as best I could to my journalism students. I also took them on

educational field trips to National Geographic.

On one such outing I left the class briefly under the supervision of two teacher's assistants and took the elevator up to the seventh floor. It was a Saturday in the summer, so there was nobody working on the upper floors. I went into my father's old office, which was now someone else's, and found myself thinking about a cold winter night in 1986, when I met my father (then the senior associate editor of National Geographic) and the writer C. D. B. Bryan at the Irish Connection, a bar in the basement of a building right across the street. I was a student at Catholic University who had just published his first article as a professional—a piece for the *Progressive* on preventing animal cruelty.

Bryan was the popular author of the book about Vietnam, *Friendly Fire*, and he had been hired by the magazine to write the book *The National Geographic Society: 100 Years of Adventure and Discovery*, which would be published in 1987. My father had invited me to meet him because he knew I had a fascination with Vietnam that I had developed in high school and because, as I was a young journalist, he knew that I would be enthralled to meet such an accomplished writer. Bryan wrote for the *New Yorker*, *Harper's*, *Esquire*, *Rolling Stone*, and the *New York Times Book Review*. He had gone to Yale University, where he was chairman of the campus humor magazine the *Yale Record*, and he had served in the army in Korea.

Over pints of Guinness we talked about music, literature, sports, what it was like to write a massive history of National Geographic. Bryan expressed delight that I had just published my first article, but he added, “The *Progressive* is a great place to start. I don't know if you'd want your daughter dating a writer from there, but still.” We discussed *Friendly Fire*, which told the tragic story of Michael Mullen, an American soldier who had been killed by friendly fire in Vietnam and revealed the lies the government had told about his death. It also explored in moving detail how Mullen's parents, especially his mother, went from staunch patriots to antiwar activists.²¹¹

Thirty years later, in January 2017, National Geographic would publish a special issue on the “Gender Revolution.” The authors of the various articles completely accept the catechism of the sexual revolution and its transgender shock troops. The logical inconsistencies in the articles are staggering, and the gap between C. D. B. Bryan and the pride parade that marched through National Geographic in 2017 is tragically representative of the magazine's slide into “wokeism.”

National Geographic now reflects an obsession with race, gender, and “equity,” dedicating covers to slavery, feminism, and Black Lives Matter.

In the magazine’s April 2018 “Race” issue, Susan Goldberg, editor of the magazine from 2014 –2022, offered this shirt-rending headline: “For Decades, Our Coverage Was Racist. To Rise Above Our Past, We Must Acknowledge It.”²¹² Goldberg hired a scholar, John Edwin Mason of the University of Virginia, to dig through the archives and find evidence of unconscious white supremacy. Interviewed by Vox, Mason declared that the magazine had been “born at the height of so-called ‘scientific’ racism and imperialism—including American imperialism. This culture of white supremacy shaped the outlook of the magazine’s editors, writers, and photographers, who were always white and almost always men.” Referring to a recent cover image of a cowboy on horseback, Mason pronounced, “The image of the white cowboy reproduces and romanticizes the mythic iconography of settler colonialism and white supremacy.”²¹³

In fairness, National Geographic did in fact have some articles from past decades that were cringingly racist and almost comically misguided. The most notorious may have been “Changing Berlin,” a 1937 piece by Douglas Chandler that was sympathetic to the Nazi regime. But Mason’s perspective was not that of an honest and sympathetic critic but that of an anti-woke crusader who saw racism and white supremacy under every rock.

Then there was the ridiculous, fawning documentary, *Fauci*, on Dr. Anthony Fauci. The hagiographic film discussed the chief medical adviser’s handling of the COVID pandemic, but it neglected to mention the controversies surrounding his actions.

Like other elite journalistic institutions, National Geographic has been captured by the current of political correctness, and unfortunately there is no turning back. For me it provides another example of the death of what was once the best of liberalism. Before being corrupted by wokeness and overtaken by the new Stasi media, liberalism was a questing, largely honest ideology that sought to correct injustice while celebrating the foundational principles of free speech, hard work, and scientific rigor. Before the woke revolution, National Geographic lived these values.

C. B. D. Bryan exemplified this noble journalistic tradition. He didn’t expose the

lies surround Michael Mullen's death because of his hatred of America and her institutions but to reveal how government lies had deceived a proud American family about the death of their son. In 1976, the New York Review of Books ran a review of *Friendly Fire* by Diane Johnson. The piece criticized Bryan, claiming that he was "patronizing" and "condescending" to the Mullens while letting off easy military men like Lieutenant Colonel Norman Schwarzkopf Jr., who would later oversee the liberation of Kuwait during the Gulf War.²¹⁴ In other words, Johnson attacked Bryan from the left.

In a response that was printed in the letters section, Bryan punched back:

I love Peg and Gene Mullen, they have been as family to me these past five years, I think them heroic people. Ms. Johnson's implication that I felt "patronizing" or "condescending" or "deprecated Peg's courage" is so patently wrong that I am ashamed such a suggestion might even appear in print. And yet such a gross misinterpretation might be the consequence of my efforts to keep myself out of *Friendly Fire* as much as possible. It is not, after all, my story or Schwarzkopf's or even Michael's; it is Peg's and Gene's. Because I became a part of their story I should perhaps have been more explicit about my own feelings. Perhaps not. Frankly, I don't know the answer to that question yet....

What I tried to show was that this Iowa farm family's anger, bitterness, paranoia, suspiciousness, and heartbreak were the understandable and inevitable result of the insensitive, arrogant, and bureaucratic treatment they had received—and not just from the military, the government, their community, and their priest but, to my horror, from myself as well. I was forced to face that ugly dwarf-soul in every writer who, when confronted by someone's personal anguish, feels that flicker of detachment which tells him that he is also witnessing "good material." (At those moments one senses a dreadful kinship with those ghouls gathered below a suicide's ledge.) And yet, as I wrote in *Friendly Fire*: "it was precisely the exploitation of Peg's grief upon which any [book] would have to depend." To admit that does not mean one does not feel sympathy and love and understanding at the same time; it merely means that the writer recognizes that this moment of anguish provides a means of expressing that anguish to others.²¹⁵

He closed with this:

I do not accept Ms. Johnson's implication that because Lt. Col. Schwarzkopf was a professional military officer that he could not also be a fine man. Yes, he was ambitious; yes, many of the men hated him because he insisted on discipline in the field, that the men wear their helmets and flak jackets (if Michael had had his flak jacket on he would not have been killed), but he was not a criminal. Why is it so inconceivable to Ms. Johnson that Gene Mullen and Norm Schwarzkopf could not both be fine men?²¹⁶

Liberalism could indeed once see that both of these men could be fine individuals. Bryan's admission that his "dwarf-soul" saw in the Mullens' grief "good material" is also a grown-up confession that one would never find in modern media. Yet this kind of honesty and integrity was common among my father's colleagues at National Geographic—the photographers, scholars, and eccentric explorers who would come to dinner at our house in Maryland and who (for me) were gathered at his funeral.

When I met Bryan on that night in 1986, National Geographic itself was in a battle over its direction. My father and his colleague, the top editor Wilbur E. Garrett, had been pushing for years to do more relevant stories—not advocacy journalism, just stuff that engaged grittier subjects like AIDS and life in Harlem. Opposed to them was Gil Grosvenor, who had been editor of National Geographic from 1970 to 1980 before becoming president of the organization. Garrett, a tough, mercurial, and brilliant man who had grown up poor in Missouri during the Depression, wanted National Geographic to reflect the real world while also keeping to its tradition of great photography and uplifting travelogues to exotic places. Tellingly, Grosvenor fought Garrett's idea for an entire issue dedicated to the two-hundredth anniversary of France, an issue that won the 1989 National Magazine Award.

Tensions between Grosvenor, Garrett, and my father came to a head in 1990, when Grosvenor fired both Garrett and my dad. The press depicted Grosvenor as the villain (accurately in my view), a stubborn, retrograde man refusing to

acknowledge that the world had changed. Circulation dropped. After a rough transition period of a few weeks, my father settled into and enjoyed his retirement before succumbing to cancer in 1996. He loved bird-watching and going to the racetrack to bet on the horses. He also never relinquished the John F. Kennedy liberalism of his youth—scientifically rigorous, Catholic, anti-racist, pro-union, pro-environment, and pro-life.

My dad had written articles on Ireland, Jerusalem, Hong Kong, Australia, and South Africa. He ran the rapids in the Grand Canyon and produced a record on the space program for the magazine; and in November 1986, National Geographic published the results of his five-year study to determine the location of Christopher Columbus's landing place in the New World. Dad had determined that the site was Samana Cay, a small isle about sixty-five miles from the traditional location, Watling Island.

That faith in science is nowhere to be found in National Geographic's recent issue on the gender revolution. The section titled "Helping Families Talk about Gender" offers this: "Understand that gender identity and sexual orientation cannot be changed, but the way people identify their gender identity and sexual orientation may change over time as they discover more about themselves."²¹⁷ As professors and theologians Andrew T. Walker and Denny Burk commented in the Public Discourse, "Gender identity is not an objective category but a subjective one. It is how one perceives his or her own sense of maleness or femaleness.... If that perception is fixed and immutable (as the first half of the sentence asserts), then it is incoherent to say that one's self-perception can change over time (as the second half of the sentence asserts). One's self-perception can either change or not. It can't be both."²¹⁸ They add, "The claim that transgender identities are equally as fixed and unchanging as sexual orientation is simply not supported by any kind of scientific consensus."

Another article offers a full-page picture of a "shirtless 17-year-old girl who recently underwent a voluntary double mastectomy." Walker and Burke: "Why do transgender ideologues consider it harmful to attempt to change such a child's mind but consider it progress to display her bare, mutilated chest for a cover story?"²¹⁹

Seeing such gruesome nonsense, I am reminded of C. D. B. Bryan's little joke more than thirty years ago: National Geographic is a great place to start. Still, I don't know if you'd want your daughter dating a writer from there.

PART FIVE

■

THIS CAN'T HAPPEN IN AMERICA

In the aftermath of the Kavanaugh war, I didn't feel much like doing any journalism. I also couldn't get hired anywhere. I took a series of jobs doing manual labor. I wanted to be as far away from Washington and the elites as possible. I just wanted to ride my skateboard.

There were times when it was hard to control my anger at the hit that had been put out on Brett and me. The truth was, I was suffering from PTSD. Everybody these days claims to have PTSD, from Hollywood actors to teenagers who can't find a parking space, but I had the real thing. I was having nightmares, still thought I was being watched, and would erupt in rage at minor things.

So it was that I spent ten minutes hollering at former Speaker of the House Paul Ryan in a Maryland parking lot.

It was October of 2018. I found myself purely by accident sitting next to Ryan in a Maryland breakfast joint, and I took the opportunity to try and get my point across. The Speaker did say that he recognized me from the news reports. His own response to the Kavanaugh battle had been, in my view, lukewarm. "The Republican base is very much activated as a result of this. I think the Democratic base was already there," Ryan said after a speech to the National Press Club in Washington at the time. "I could just see it just from traveling around the country in the last few days, traveling around Wisconsin. The Republican base is definitely animated after this."²²⁰

Ryan and I exchanged polite small talk while we finished eating, and then I asked him to talk outside in the parking lot. He obliged, but when we got out there a lot of the anger I had built up from my mauling by the American Stasi just came spilling out. I remember talking about evil and due process and saying, over and over again, "This cannot happen in America!" The Speaker listened and we shook hands. He was polite and we parted in a friendly manner.

My object in engaging Speaker Ryan was to try and convince him that we are living in a time of danger every bit as serious as when Communist spies infiltrated the government after World War II. I wanted to get across that there is absolutely no space between the modern Western Left and the deadly Maoists of the Chinese Cultural Revolution. Both are only interested in your humiliation and submission. They care nothing for freedom and laugh at the idea of compromise.

I wanted to convey to Ryan that things now are not like they were under President Reagan, when the majority of Americans agreed on basic principles. America is under attack from socialists, feminists, and critical race theorists who would not think twice about eliminating our rights. The Democrats have become a criminal enterprise similar to the German Stasi, who looked for heterodoxy from the party line in every aspect of human life. We are in a war, Speaker Ryan.

Unfortunately, because I was still so angry, I fear that a lot of my words came out in a jumble. I also want to note that Speaker Ryan was kind and empathetic and a good listener. My object was to try and convince him of the unique danger of the time we are living through, not to trash him.

The first job I got after 2018 was as a dishwasher in a local French bakery. Of course they hired me on the spot. Nobody else wanted to spend seven hours a day suffocating in jungle-level heat, gagging on a stupid COVID mask, getting soaking wet, and wearing your muscles to exhaustion by scraping eggs, chocolate, bread dough, and other muck off of the trays, plates, soup bowls, assorted cutlery, and Tupperware that were piled from floor to ceiling.

I'd had plenty of experience as a waiter and bartender from my college years, but tipping would be hit or miss during the pandemic. I also didn't like the late hours. I could work in a retail store, but that was too much exposure to the heavy-breathing public. Then I was walking through a town in Virginia when I came to a French bakery. There was a sign in the window: "Dishwasher Wanted Apply Within."

A couple of hours later I had my rubber apron on. The first wave came. My back, legs, shoulders, and arms creaked with muscle memory from years before, nights spent bartending at the Cinema 'n' Drafthouse in Maryland or wrestling the punters during shows at the Bayou in Georgetown.

Wave after wave of dishes rolled in. Trays wheeled in mounted on towering carts, everything covered in cheese, dough, caramel, and other goo. Big bowls appeared, clattering and filled with ice cream scoopers, knives, forks, grabbers, whisks, and wooden gewgaws. Still more trays. And yet more. Hose off with hot water, scrape, dunk, soap off, move right to left, right to left, right to left. The cook walked by and said something in French. He didn't know I took two years in high school. Yes, it's nice out. Oui, il fait tres beau. Not that I would know about it.

At the end of my shift I drove home, completely waterlogged, sore like I just played a game in the NFL, and exhausted. I wasn't sure I could even make it from the car to my front door. That night a friend called, and when he heard I was working as a dishwasher, he said he found my situation "poignant." I'd been a book author, a contributor to the Washington Post and the New York Times, and the target of an explosive and well-publicized 2018 political hit. My friend reminded me of something I hadn't thought about since my time at Catholic University in the 1980s. At the end of the Inferno, Dante can only escape hell by climbing over Satan's balls and asshole. "You're stuck in Satan's anus," he said. "You just gotta keep climbing."

Yes, the only way through it is through it. And the crisis, if we're lucky, will remind us how far we as human souls have become separated from our true selves and bodies.

From the dishwashing job, which got old pretty quickly, I moved on to the garden center at a large home-improvement store. I had also achieved a kind of Zen calm from working as a laborer. The mulch pit wasn't bad. I would spend all day tossing big sacks of fertilizer into idling cars. The work came in waves. I'd be out there for an hour and nothing would happen. I'd lean against a five-foot tower of Scotts red mulch, thinking about God or sex or a good song, just watching the birds go by. Then suddenly it'd be five cars deep: do-it-yourselfers getting ten bags of Miracle Gro, a bored housewife wanting two of the Leafgro compost, guys with erosion problems needing four rolls of topsoil and two units of peat moss, landscapers loading up with fifty bags of the black mulch and a couple bales of hay.

After years in journalism and caring about politics, the new job made it easy to adapt to a Zen way of living. I spent all day loading bags of peat moss, mulch, topsoil, sod, and the occasional hay bale into cars. That kind of work builds your

muscles and focuses your attention so sharply on the immediate task in front of you that the mind becomes free. You forget about current events, bills, and personal dramas. You come home worn out but satisfied with your labor, attaining a kind of Buddhist living-in-the-present vibe.

I was at work one day when I got a message from Isabella, a girl I had dated briefly in high school. Isabella had known, and believed, Christine Blasey Ford. By now I had changed jobs and was working in the mulch pit of a local home-improvement store. Isabella and I hadn't seen each other in decades, and she wanted to meet. We decided to get together at the Tastee Diner, a popular hangout from our high school days. I wore khaki shorts, a T-shirt with Rita Hayworth on it, and some preppy J.Crew shoes. It had been years, but I knew she would like the shoes. They were totally me.

Isabella and I only dated briefly as teenagers, but we clicked on several levels. The daughter of a Puerto Rican mother and a Scots-Irish father, Isabella was artistic, very intelligent, passionate, spiritual, and witty. She had moved to Mexico after college and lived there for twenty-three years, and we'd lost touch decades ago. Now her father, who lives in DC, was ailing, and she was back in the area. We decided to meet at the Tastee Diner, a spot that had been a late-night gathering place when we were younger.

When word got out that we were meeting, some of her friends asked Isabella why in the world she was seeing me, and several of my friends asked me the same about her. It was a note-for-note repeat of what we heard when we dated in high school. She was artistic, sarcastic, and whip-smart, the kind of girl that intimidated young boys. I was, as everyone knew, a bit of a lunatic. Both sets of friends didn't understand why we were with each other.

I was thrilled to see Isabella, knowing that we could still lock into each other's frequencies the way we did in high school. We both were spiritual seekers, liked literature and culture, and loved music and parties. After the political fiasco, bouts with illness, and broken relationships, I was almost desperate for someone who knew me deep down and who could read me without saying too much. Isabella and I could be on different sides politically and still have a beautiful affection for each other, the kind that only comes with people you were close to when you were young.

It didn't take long to pick up where we'd left off decades earlier. Isabella is still

vivacious, funny, intense, and beautiful. We talked about old friends, laughed about our teenage make out sessions, shared about the duty of caring for ailing parents, empathized about failed loves. The Tastee Diner, where we spent so many late nights in the 1980s, was now dwarfed by a new, six-hundred-million-dollar Marriott global headquarters, built on top of where we sat eating french fries. Like the diner itself, we had refused to sell out.

After a few hours we hugged and parted ways. “Hey,” she said before heading off. “I really like those shoes. They’re really you.”

After I saw Isabella, I did something that became crucial to my recovery process. I went skateboarding.

“Do not bother children when they are skateboarding” is rule number eleven in Jordan Peterson’s phenomenal bestseller *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos*. Peterson explores how skateboarding is a way for boys to court danger and learn to deal with risk and pain and as such is a valuable source of socialization and psychic health. To Peterson, the buzzkills who clamp down on skateboard riders suffer from acute resentment; they are bitter at the freedom, bravery, and style of the riders: “Beneath the production of rules stopping the skateboarders from doing highly skilled, courageous and dangerous things, I see the operation of an insidious and profoundly anti-human spirit.”²²¹

I certainly felt dehumanized by the Kavanaugh battle. Riding through the streets of Washington, I felt far away from 2018 and the ridiculous people who spend their lives on Capitol Hill and in the media’s corridors of power. I also newly appreciated the spiritual power of skateboarding, the beautiful Zen awareness it can ignite.

One morning I was skateboarding down a beautiful slope of connecting suburban streets. At one point my route ran past the house of a childhood friend, who was watching me from her large living room window. She was curious: What was I doing out there? What led me to launch downhill on a skateboard, particularly at age fifty-something, and float through the Maryland countryside?

My answer was at first very technical. I ride a Carver board, I told her, because they have this fantastic, patented swivel design in the front truck that makes it move like a surfboard and because they have these great graphic designs, plus it's good for balance.

That's great, she replied, but why, in my heart, did I skateboard?

I loved the feeling of the air against my face, I said, and how the streets look as you ride by, and the funny dogs that come to greet you, and the feeling of being in motion even as the earth is in motion and God's wondrous cosmos is in motion.

"Oh," she said. "So, you're out there praying."

I just looked at her, a bit stunned. Why, yes. I had never thought about it that way. But yes. Skateboarding for me is like prayer. My friend and I had both gone to Jesuit schools, and didn't the men of that order teach us to be "contemplatives in action?" That was as good a description as any.

Shortly after our conversation I wrote an essay for Modern Age in which I reflected on my own history with skateboarding, how the sport has reappeared at different times in my life to reenchant and heal me.²²² One rider I quoted had described in the online journal Buddha Weekly how when he stopped worrying about doing tricks and simply rode his board home without bells and whistles, he experienced a feeling of blissful Zen peace.²²³ The rider, Sonic Mike, was fully present in the moment (you have to be when riding). His breathing became steady, regulated. He was noticing the world around him. He was, in fact, praying.

One of my favorite streets to ride feeds out on both ends to major routes into and out of Washington, DC, and the different reactions I get there tell a story. The laborers, electricians, lawn maintenance guys, and plumbers active during the day all cheer me on and sometimes stop me to enthusiastically talk history and board specs. A lot of them brag about their own riding back in the day. Recently one of them in a white van called after me as I did a cutback in front of him. He asked if my board was running on a battery, and I said no and headed downhill, hearing him shout behind me: "Old school, man! Old school!"

On that same street during rush hour, when the bureaucrats are going back and forth from the city, I'll occasionally get a dirty look or a lecture about speed. In

their bumptious tone of disapproval, it's obvious that they are either government workers, lawyers, or journalists—maybe all three. I let them talk, then watch them pass.

I also spent a lot of time at the beach, away from DC. I wanted to live in a Terrence Malick movie. His best films, works like *Days of Heaven*, *The Thin Red Line*, and *The New World*, all involve a protagonist who is pulled away from a dreamlike paradise to confront war, violence, sin. I was living in the dappled, spiritually charged world of the spirit, which is, ultimately, the real world. The cold and restless Atlantic was like my subconscious, what Jung would call my shadow, the dark, lustful, depressed, angry, and creative soul.

I also tried to meditate and attain what is called “mindfulness”—a way of being present in the world and not letting the past dictate your actions. Mindfulness is defined by professor of medicine Jon Kabat-Zinn as “the awareness that arises through paying attention, on purpose, in the present moment, non-judgmentally.”²²⁴ Buddhist nun Pema Chödrön says that “meditation gives us the opportunity to have an open, compassionate attentiveness to whatever is going on. The meditative space is like the big sky—spacious, vast enough to accommodate anything that arises.”²²⁵ It's an Eastern practice that in recent years has become hugely popular in the West.

But it can be practiced by Christians as well. Indeed, it is deeply rooted in Catholic traditions of prayer and contemplation. Unlike Buddhist and New Age meditation, however, Christian mindfulness sees the world not as an illusion but as a place “charged with the grandeur of God.”²²⁶

The best term for what I experienced, and continue to practice, is what the theologian Charles Stone calls “holy noticing.” In his book *Holy Noticing: The Bible, Your Brain, and the Mindful Space Between Moments*, Stone argues that mindfulness is not New Age but biblical. He defines mindfulness as “the art of holy noticing—noticing, with a holy purpose, God and His handiwork, our relationships, and our inner world of thoughts and feelings.”²²⁷ He then goes on: “Should Christians embrace [mindfulness] just because everyone else is doing it? No. Much about mindfulness in popular culture has nothing to do with God, Jesus, the Bible, or Christianity. And ‘Christianizing’ the latest fad dilutes the faith and can lead us astray.”²²⁸

Stone's book shows how the Bible and church history support the discipline of

holy noticing. There are almost two hundred biblical references throughout the book, passages like Psalm 139:23–24: “Search me, O God, and know my heart! Try me and know my thoughts!”; Romans 12:1–2: “I appeal to you therefore, brethren, by the mercies of God, to present your bodies as a living sacrifice, holy and acceptable to God, which is your spiritual worship. Do not be conformed to this world but be transformed by the renewing of your mind, that you may prove what is the will of God, what is good and acceptable and perfect”; or Philippians 4:8: “Finally, brethren, whatever is true, whatever is honorable, whatever is just, whatever is pure, whatever is lovely, whatever is gracious, if there is any excellence, if there is anything worth of praise, think about these things.” These are key verses for Stone’s understanding of holy noticing.

In *Christ-Centred Mindfulness: Connection to Self and God*, Katherine Thompson goes through the history of Christianity to reclaim a Christian mindfulness practice where the focus is on Christ. Like Stone, Thompson cites passages from the Bible to support her argument. She holds that Christ-centered mindfulness is actually “a form of prayer that dates back hundreds of years.”²²⁹ Christian mindfulness or meditation is based on “contemplative prayer,” the silent prayer in which you focus your mind on God. This was the exercise of Saint Teresa of Avila, Saint Ignatius of Loyola, and Thomas Merton. Saint Teresa’s *The Interior Castle* is a detailed contemplation about entering the heart of God. “Contemplation is the highest expression of man’s intellectual and spiritual life,” Thomas Merton wrote in that memorable passage I had first come across all those years ago, the day I met Brett Kavanaugh. “It is spiritual wonder. It is spontaneous awe at the sacredness of life, of being. It is a vivid realization of the fact that life and being in us proceed from an invisible, transcendent and infinitely abundant source. Contemplation is, above all, awareness of the reality of that source.”²³⁰

“Christian mindfulness practice is rooted in the most basic witness of Jesus: God is with us, right here, right now,” Amy G. Oden observes in *Right Here Right Now: The Practice of Christian Mindfulness*. “Jesus proclaims, The reign of God is at hand! here, now, available for all, if we pay attention. Or, as Jesus says, if we have eyes to see and ears to hear. If we are mindful.”²³¹

One of the most rewarding experiences of holy noticing can come during intense physical activity, a theory that is also an essential component of PTSD treatment. In his book *The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma*, Dutch psychiatrist Bessel van der Kolk argues that trauma has nothing

to do with rational cognition but “has to do with your body being reset to interpret the world as a dangerous place.”²³² Van der Kolk believes that “the single most important issue for traumatized people is to find a sense of safety in their own bodies.”²³³

In interviews he has also spoken about a spiritual experience he had when he was a teenager. He was hitchhiking through France when he passed a monastery. He heard the chanting of monks and was so taken with the sound that he asked the driver to let him off right then and there. Van der Kolk spent the rest of that summer at the monastery, then returned two more times before his medical interests took him to Hawaii.²³⁴

Meanwhile I found myself strongly drawn to veterans, not to compare myself to them, but to put my own experience into perspective. I went to Virginia Beach, a military town, to try surfing and to attend 12-Step meetings where I knew there would be vets. Here were guys who had gone through multiple tours of duty and watched comrades die, something that made my experience look like a petty political hit job. Still, I identified with the combat vets whom I heard talk about their inability to shut down after an intense battle.

I once interviewed Army chaplain Justin David Roberts, who has served time in Afghanistan with the No Slack division of the 101st Airborne (motto: “No breather from work, no relief from combat, no request for respite”). Roberts is the director of the documentary *No Greater Love*, which explores not only the trauma of battle but also the exhilaration. Many of the soldiers in the film talk about the “high” they got from being in combat. “You don’t really realize the physiological affect,” Roberts said. He recalled that when he returned from Afghanistan, he “was really craving” a fist fight. He finally realized that he wasn’t craving the fight but the adrenaline that came with it: “You get that rush. I couldn’t find it at home.” Roberts told me that’s why so many returning soldiers buy motorcycles and engage in other physically and emotionally charged and dangerous hobbies.²³⁵

For me the thing that fed my soul was skateboarding. Kyle Beachy, author of *The Most Fun Thing: Dispatches from a Skateboard Life*, observes that even for a married forty-one-year-old man, skateboarding “continues to fill a necessary if difficult-to-name void.”²³⁶ The “sacred” act of skateboarding helps Beachy move through the difficulties and joys of life with “rhythm and harmony.” Different riding styles can also reflect the different sides of human nature—sometimes

cautious, sometimes daring, sometimes foolhardy. Visiting a favorite Chicago spot where rides, Beachy reaches for the metaphysical: “This is where the meaningless activity [of skateboarding] has brought me. Via a long sequence of questions about selfhood and performance, about watching and comprehending, I have come to think that the style skateboarders speak of might, in fact, be a tool for understanding what mankind used to call the soul.”²³⁷

Indeed. There has long been a correlation between human movement, whether it’s dance, play, or lovemaking—which John Paul II called “an icon of the interior life of God”²³⁸—and the soul. Skateboarding is an Olympic sport, a billion-dollar industry, and an edgy subculture. It’s also an expression of the soul. In this way it is like another great, original American art form, jazz.

Like jazz, skateboarding has certain rules and traditions that need to be mastered while also expecting and celebrating innovation and improvisation. Also like jazz, skateboarding started as something “outsider,” somewhat disreputable, a subculture of misfits and outcasts.

And just as it’s impossible to fake jazz chops, one can’t fake skateboarding. One of the best essays in *The Most Fun Thing* is a profile of Jeff Grosso, the sport’s unofficial ambassador. Grosso died in March 2020 and was described as “the soul of skateboarding.” Like Beachy, Grosso sought to understand this thing, skateboarding, that still held him in thrall well into adulthood. “It’s a total rush,” Grosso told the *St. Louis Post-Dispatch* in 1986. “It’s the feeling that when you go out there with your board, it’s a no-hero type of thing. And you either accomplish something or you don’t.”²³⁹

For many skateboarders, “riding is important for our personal integrity because it is such a genuine, soulful and uncompromising part of life itself.” You can’t fake it. That’s why I, as a downhill rider from the 1970s, don’t do tricks. I learned to skateboard as a kid riding the suburbs of Maryland, not in skate parks, and if I tried to do tricks it would be phony and affected. When you are at the top of a hill about to push off, or looking down at a concrete staircase about to attempt a rail slide, or even just trying an ollie, there is no way to cheat or fudge. As Grosso said, either you will accomplish something, or you won’t. Beachy puts it well in the best passage from *The Most Fun Thing*:

How many of us, I wonder, are lucky enough or doomed enough to have a force such as this in our lives? A practice, I mean, or pursuit or activity, an entity, or really any kind of thing whatsoever, that we fear or respect enough that we will not lie to it, or try to trick it, or approach it with anything short of total candor? A thing that we know can see through us, that will laugh at our folly without reserve, revealing sharp and yellow teeth, pointing a long finger to mock our reality? And will just as readily offer embrace for our persistence and reward us with a joy that has no cognate, that is its own unique end?

Not many.²⁴⁰

At various times in the fall of 2018, the Stasi media told the public that I had been Brett Kavanaugh's wingman at a series of wild bacchanalian parties, bought and sold cocaine, and presided over no fewer than ten gang rapes.

As time went on the worst of these lies and distortions were exposed by conservative reporters doing the job that liberal editors at major publications should have done. Gradually the shabby methods of the Stasi media were exposed for all to see.

The most shocking instance of journalistic malfeasance is the failure of the Post's Emma Brown to include any reference to Leland Keyser in her initial story about the Ford memo. This was noticed right away thanks to the watchful eye of Kimberley Strassel. It should have been enough to get her fired, but apparently suppressing exculpatory facts in a high-profile confirmation hearing is not considered malpractice by current journalistic standards.

In a similar act of ideological fact suppression—also detailed above—NBC's Kate Snow withheld damaging information about Michael Avenatti when to publish it would have undermined the claims of Julie Swetnick.

In February 2019, months after Brett was confirmed, Vanity Fair published a

lengthy hit piece on Georgetown Prep by Evgenia Peretz detailing all kinds of bad behavior by the jock elite, including me and Brett, and the supposed “code of silence” that concealed our abuses until they were at last brought to light by the courageous Ford.²⁴¹ Heavily sourced from my own candid confessional writings, the piece describes me thus:

Judge took the cake. He was the loudest, edgiest, baddest ass. He was also the heartthrob. In Breakfast Club terms, you might say he had the dangerous allure of Judd Nelson’s Bender combined with the popularity of Emilio Estevez’s Andrew Clark. His body couldn’t contain his energy. He would leap onto people’s backs to start games of chicken. He could place his hands on a banister and jettison his body over an entire stairwell.²⁴²

As one of my friends quipped, “Wow, part Mel Gibson, part Tom Cruise, part ape.”

More than an attack on Brett, the Vanity Fair piece is framed as an indictment of the entire white, male, upper-class American elite. The Prep boys are described as mainly the sons of wealthy, conservative families from the Maryland “horse country.” There were few middle-class kids, few “students of color,” and, of course, being a school run by Jesuits, few women: The original article read, “Any female presence consisted of the librarian, the secretary in the president’s office, and perhaps two teachers.” Peretz also alleges strong whiffs of homophobia and anti-Semitism.

Like so much mainstream reporting these days, Peretz’s article reflects the rage of the resentful people who never lost their hatred of what she called “the kings of the school”—swaggering, entitled bullies who liked to stuff underclassmen into garbage cans.

Kavanaugh, according to some former classmates, was not the central showman, but rather an eager sidekick. An alum who knew Kavanaugh well recalls, “He had the attitude of ‘I’m the man, I’m a badass, and everybody else is kind of a loser. I do what I want. I get what I want.’ He was more of a dick, for lack of a

better word.”

The piece goes on to detail the notorious weekend party scene at which people passed out in driveways and got run over by cars.

As Judge put it, “if you could breathe and walk at the same time, you could hook up with someone.” But hooking up wasn’t always about mutual pleasure. Since Kavanaugh’s confirmation hearing, countless women from his private-school scene have been sharing experiences they had that mirror the one Blasey Ford described.

According to Peretz, these girls were only there because they wanted to be liked by these popular boys and were seeking “affirmation.”²⁴³

Prep pushed back and Vanity Fair was immediately forced to correct a number of errors. Daily Wire writer Ashe Schow noted three corrections within days of publication:

The original article claimed [an] alumnus...was the school’s quarterback, but he was actually the tight end. It also claimed source Evie Shapiro “attended Potomac High School and went to Catholic University with [Mark] Judge.” Shapiro actually went to Churchill High School in Potomac, as there is no Potomac High School. She also attended the University of Maryland, not Catholic University.

Finally, the original article claimed “[a]ny female presence consisted of the librarian, the secretary in the president’s office, and perhaps two teachers.”... There were actually 16 women serving on the staff during the 1982-1983 academic year, four of whom were faculty members.²⁴⁴

According to a spokesman from Prep, no effort was made by Peretz or her editors to check her assertions: “The magazine’s editors did zero fact checking with us. We could have straightened all those errors out and we had asked for the chance to respond but it seems like she just didn’t care. And if she can’t even get basic facts right like that or own up to the mistakes, then why should readers take anything she says seriously?”²⁴⁵

How indeed? The Daily Wire found a lot more mistakes and omissions, including many that appear to be deliberate distortions intended to bolster the article’s narrative. These include the fact that many prominent Democrats also attended the school, not just rich Republicans, and that the student body president in 1983 was black; using an illegally recorded speech by Prep’s headmaster and cherry-picking his remarks to fit the story’s narrative; failing to respond to multiple emails from the school; and making numerous misrepresentations concerning the school’s handling of a sexual abuse scandal dating long after the 1980s.²⁴⁶ These kinds of shabby, corner-cutting methods are enough to undermine any claim to serious journalism. But it is par for the course for the new American Stasi.

The piece also contains this astonishing passage: “To many Americans, Kavanaugh didn’t seem like a sexual predator—but that wasn’t the point. The point was that he couldn’t give an inch of possible culpability. He couldn’t say, ‘I’m sorry for what I might have done.’”²⁴⁷

To anyone who has escaped a Communist country, that aside is deeply chilling. Why should a man apologize for something he insists he didn’t do? But it no longer matters if one is innocent or not. We are living in the age of the show trial and the forced apology. All that matters is that we submit to our liberal betters.

Soon books started coming out by reporters who had covered the hearings. In the time-honored tradition of the American reputation machine, it was time for these partisan hacks to recycle their shabby reporting into equally shabby books for

which they were naturally paid big advances.

Jackie Calmes's book *Dissent* discusses Brett Kavanaugh's elevation to the Supreme Court in 2018. I previously discussed how Calmes pushed the erroneous idea that Ford wanted to remain confidential. In her book, Calmes reports that friends of Ford may have leaked Ford's personal information. One of Ford's California friends is Deepa Lalla, the vice president of Medical Affairs at Puma Biotechnology. In *Dissent*, Lalla speculates about who leaked Ford's identity:

Deepa Lalla, however, wondered whether she'd inadvertently helped Ford's identity slip. "I know I talked to friends," she said, to get advice on Ford's behalf. "I never used her name, I never used background." Lalla reviewed her texts to confirm that. Even so, Ford conceded long after that she and her confidants could well bear some responsibility for the leak of her identity.²⁴⁸

As noted earlier, in the summer of 2018, in fact even before Brett became the nominee on July 9, Ford was doing research with opposition researcher Keith Koegler. In *Dissent*, Calmes adds more. Even before Brett became the final pick, Koegler had gotten the name from Ford:

Koegler recognized the name. As a lawyer, he had become interested in the politics surrounding the federal courts, and the influence of the Federalist Society, in the two years since Mitch McConnell blocked President Obama's Nomination of Merrick Garland. Now Koegler indeed began reading up on Kavanaugh. From that point on, he became Ford's all around confidant, legal aid, and character witness.²⁴⁹

To recap: Christine Blasey Ford, who some described as a "crazy liberal" (see the book *Justice on Trial*), and who scrubbed her social media accounts in 2018, always intended to go public. She may have done so with the help of her own friends. Not only that, but she was partnering with a personal opposition

researcher to dig up dirt on me and Brett. It's why all those deep-dive profiles about me, Brett, and Georgetown Prep appeared fully formed all at once. It was all prepared ahead of time, a perfect symbiosis between the Devil's Triangle of the media, the activist-funded oppo researchers, and the politicians.

In *Dissent*, Calmes writes:

Kavanaugh's close friend and football teammate Mark Judge would provide a revealing window into the guys' attitude toward the non-Catholic girls, writing in his "underground" student newspaper *The Unknown Hoya* that Holton Arms... "is the home of the most worthless excuse for human females." A Holton girl was an "H.H.," he wrote: "Holton Hosebag."

There's only one problem: I did not write those words. Calmes, who has more than three decades of experience at newspapers, never seems to consider that editors, even the editors of rambunctious high school underground newspapers, don't write all the articles in their publications. Calmes didn't check that "fact" and apparently doesn't care. Because the job of the new Stasi media is to promote the Left's agenda while destroying as many innocent lives as necessary.

Calmes also says that FBI agents "spoke with Judge more than once."²⁵⁰ This is false. I spoke to the FBI exactly one time.

She also uses in her book the same "source" who was used by the *Washington Post*—a writer named Mike Sacks. As I've already explained, Sacks was only profiled in the *Washington Post* in October 2018 because they could not find anyone else that knew us who would talk to them. "For the record," the *Post* dutifully noted, "Sacks didn't go to Georgetown Prep in Bethesda, the school Kavanaugh and Judge attended. He went to public school. He didn't belong to a country club, just the neighborhood pool."²⁵¹

This is pretty thin gruel for someone who is essentially being offered as a character witness in a Supreme Court nomination. Sacks never laid eyes on any of us and can only speak of us as dislikeable "types" whom he obviously resented from an avowedly class-based perspective.

Finally, there is Calmes's selective editing. On October 2, 2018, Dwight Garner, a book critic for the New York Times, reviewed *Wasted*, my painful, funny memoir of adolescent alcohol abuse. In her piece, Calmes quotes this line from Garner's review: "Wasted is the story of a privileged young white man, a cocky princeling among cocky princelings."²⁵²

Sounds pretty damning. The problem is, it's only half the sentence. Here is Garner's full quote: "Wasted is the story of a privileged young white man, a cocky princeling among cocky princelings, who loses his virginity, loses his religion, loses his lunch and nearly loses his mind. These things happen to a cassette-powered soundtrack by AC/DC, The Clash, Eurythmics, R.E.M. and The Replacements."²⁵³

This leaves a very different impression of the book, including its unflinching honesty. Garner's quote was chopped because the mission of the Stasi media is to spread lies and ruin people who oppose the Left's agenda. Part of that mission involves quashing any suggestion that one of their adversaries might be a complex human being worthy of empathy.

Calmes did, however, try and track down one important piece of evidence.

It had to do with Julie Swetnick, who told the disgraceful Kate Snow that she was gang raped at a party where Brett and I were also present. On an NBC broadcast, Swetnick claimed that she saw boys "standing outside of rooms, congregated together, kind of like a gauntlet."²⁵⁴ Swetnick claimed that she did not know what was happening behind those closed doors until she says she herself was attacked around 1982. According to Swetnick, she was drugged and then "shoved into a room" where she had her "clothes torn [from] different directions." She was "touched everywhere" and "physically assaulted in every way you could possibly assault a woman."

"It was horrible," she said. "I had no way to fend them off." Swetnick also claimed that the boys were wearing Georgetown Prep uniforms, despite the fact that we wore none.

"You know what I'm going to ask," Snow said. "Everyone is wondering if Brett Kavanaugh was one of those people?"

"I cannot specifically say he was one of the ones who physically assaulted me, but before this happened to me at the party, I saw Brett Kavanaugh there, I saw

Mark Judge there, and they were hanging about the area where I began to feel disoriented and where other boys were and I could hear them laughing and laughing.”

Kate Snow then reported that “there are some differences between Swetnick’s sworn statement last week and what she told us.” In the statement, said Snow, Swetnick “became aware of [the] effort [of] say Mark Judge and others to spike the punch.” In the NBC interview, this changed to our being “near the punch.” This is the kind of thing that makes a journalist kill a story before it goes to air. To do so, however, you need shame. Kate Snow doesn’t have any.

However, there was evidence from this hell house: Swetnick said she told her mother and the Montgomery County Police about the attack shortly afterward, as well as others. Swetnick’s mother was by now deceased, and she couldn’t recall the others she had told: “I vaguely remember people but I’m not quite sure.” NBC News was told by local police officials that finding the report “could take up to a month.”²⁵⁵

Well, thirty days is nothing if you are talking about prosecuting a gang rape. It doesn’t matter if it’s thirty days or thirty weeks or thirty months. The police records must be found.

Well, someone finally tried. Toward the end of Dissent, Calmes reveals that she did try to uncover Swetnick’s supposed police report:

County officials never did search for any Swetnick police filing. The 1982 records had not been digitized, and the county records custodian told me in September 2019 that no one, including Avenatti, would pay the \$1,260 charge for looking through there thousand boxes of hundreds of microfiche files for the year. I paid the county to do so, but rescinded the work order when Swetnick, in a brief interview before the search began, retracted her claim that she was assaulted in 1982. She’d specified that year in both her sworn statement and her NBC appearance, but a year later told me it could have been 1980 or 1981.²⁵⁶

So, the exonerating evidence existed and there was a police report to prove it. Yet strangely, neither the media nor Avenatti himself would pay a grand to find

it.

Then there was John Heilemann, a journalist, author, and political commentator for MSNBC. It later came to my attention that Heilemann, who seemed to constantly be hanging out with Avenatti, was talking all kinds of smack about me at the Texas Tribune festival in the fall of 2018, when I was at the center of a national firestorm.

At the Tribune festival, held in Austin on September 27, 2018, Heilemann claimed to have known me personally at a bar in Georgetown where he worked in the 1980s, and he said that I was “either looking for someone to buy cocaine or sell cocaine.” He also called me a lot of nasty names. Heilemann admitted that he himself was a drug dealer at the time. “I was also a weed dealer,” Heilemann said in response to a question. “I worked in a [congressional] House office as a press secretary, I dealt weed, and I tended bar.”

In a YouTube video that captured the event, Heilemann said that at the bar where he worked, “the biggest problem” was me—a troublemaker and boozehound. Heilemann talked about me getting “blackout drunk,” going behind the bar to grab a bottle of tequila, and “hitting on women all the time in kind of unseemly ways.”²⁵⁷

I did drink too much in those days, as I freely admit. But the rest of Heilemann’s claims are fake news. I have categorically never bought or sold cocaine. I never looked for anyone to sell it, nor for buyers. No one who ever knew me, even in my hardest partying days in the 1980s, ever saw me buy or sell cocaine because it never happened.

Cocaine was everywhere in those days, but so was the fear of getting busted. It was easy enough to come across it without dealing it. I also wasn’t a big fan of the drug. I tried it, but it didn’t work for me. I was kind of ADHD already. I didn’t need the extra boost.

I was expecting Heilemann to lie because that’s what the Stasi media does. What surprised me was the response he got from journalist Virginia Heffernan, who was also on the panel Heilemann moderated at the Texas Tribune festival.

“I want to say a couple words in defense of Mark Judge, who I’ve never met or partied with,” she said. “He seems to me to be the sin-eater here. Do you guys know that term? In Scotland, there is one figure in the town who is supposed to

consume a meal when someone dies, to eat all of his sins.”²⁵⁸

Heffernan was on to something, and it is worth pausing to consider what it is.

As she explained, after a death in eighteenth- and nineteenth-century England, Scotland, and Wales, the person’s family placed bread on their chest, then watched as a man sat in front of the body and ate some in the belief that he was absorbing the dead person’s sins. As historian Natalie Zarrelli described it in a well-researched article, “The sin eater’s own soul was heavy with the ill deeds of countless men and women from his village or town—he paid a high spiritual price for little worldly return.”²⁵⁹

Heffernan had found an interesting metaphor. She proceeded to defend me and implied that it was Brett and other high school friends who were guilty and that I had been tasked as the sin-eater to cover their misdeeds. Unlike Heilemann, Heffernan sounded sympathetic toward me, noting that Ford’s account of the assault, in which I had supposedly jumped on top of her and Brett, could even be interpreted as implying that I had helped her escape.

There was only one problem. The sin she was so sure had been committed had in fact not taken place. Ford’s story was fake from beginning to end. If anything ever had happened to her, something no one could ever prove, it was not at the hands of Brett Kavanaugh.

I had indeed become a sin-eater, but my task was not to consume the sins of my friends but of the media. Me and my high school buddies drank some beer and chased some girls and played some sports. Not all that shocking for a bunch of teenage boys. The media on the other hand has lied, conspired with criminals, and extorted the innocent in order to destroy the lives of ordinary people. It projected all of its malice onto me, then made me eat its sins. It was Heilemann, not me, who had been a drug dealer in the 1980s. His opposition researcher, Michael Avenatti, is a sleazebag and convicted felon.²⁶⁰

What Heilemann and other media leftists probably weren’t expecting was the support that Brett was getting from black men. In October 2018, Atlantic writer and anti-racist scold Jemele Hill went to Ozy media’s “Take On America” town hall series in Baltimore. The gathering included over one hundred black men in the audience. Coming on the heels of the Kavanaugh battle, Hill was positive she was going to hear a lot of anguish over the Republican victory. Instead, she

heard support for Brett.

On Tuesday night, I was in an auditorium with 100 black men in the city of Baltimore, when the subject pivoted to Brett Kavanaugh. I expected to hear frustration that the sexual-assault allegations against him had failed to derail his Supreme Court appointment. Instead, I encountered sympathy. One man stood up and asked, passionately, “What happened to due process?” He was met with a smattering of applause, and an array of head nods.²⁶¹

“This bizarre kinship was something I noticed in my Twitter mentions, too, where black men were tossing out examples of how white lies had wrecked black lives,” Hill wrote. “Countless times, black men have had to witness the careers and reputations of other black men ruthlessly destroyed because of unproved rape and sexual-assault accusations. And as that audience member also argued, if the claims were made by a white woman, expect the damage to be triple.” Just as Clarence Thomas’s denials did in 1991, “Kavanaugh’s emotional defense of his reputation against the claims of a sympathetic white woman resonated with these unlikely allies.”²⁶²

One name continually surfaced among those who defended Brett: Brian Banks. Banks was a senior at Long Beach Polytechnic High School and a promising linebacker who had already committed to the University of Southern California when his playing career was torpedoed by a false rape accusation. As the Los Angeles Times reported in 2012, Banks served five years in prison after striking a plea deal that spared him from serving forty-one years in prison. Banks would never have been exonerated had his accuser, Wanetta Gibson, not sent Banks a friend request on Facebook once he was out of prison. Gibson, who was a high school sophomore when she accused Banks of rape, agreed to meet with Banks and a private investigator because, she said, she felt guilty and had “a desire to make amends.”²⁶³

The swift collapse of the lies around Ford’s story in 2018, including the allegations about Leland Keyser and Julie Swetnick, did move some liberals, including journalists, to question whether Ford’s account should have been brought to national attention in the first place.

Take the case of Joe Scarborough, cohost of MSNBC's Morning Joe, who had consistently used his show to platform the worst of Brett's attackers. On September 24, for instance, his guests included Jane Mayer of the New Yorker, who pushed the story of Deborah Ramirez, a Yale graduate who had been in college in the 1980s when Brett was there and who claimed that a drunken Brett had exposed himself to her at a party. While the New Yorker had gone with the Ramirez story,²⁶⁴ the New York Times could not find enough supporting evidence to run one.

On the same show, Mayer also claimed that a source had heard me talking about how I "had sex while at Georgetown Prep with some of [my] friends with the same drunk woman at the same time." At the revelation of this Penthouse Forum nugget, you could hear Morning Joe cohost Mika Brzezinski gasp in the background, "My God!" Joe then turned to NBC reporter Kasie Hunt, who did not question any part of this salacious piece of gossip and urged that I talk to the FBI. Who needed to do any real reporting?

Yet a couple of weeks later, Scarborough was harshly criticizing Democrats for holding back Ford's allegations and then springing them at the last minute. "What is so offensive about the way the Democrats outed Dr. Ford this time," he said indignantly, "is they waited until their hearings were over — they waited until they basically put their finger up in the political winds and they knew that Kavanaugh was going to pass — and then somebody on the Senate Judiciary Committee, or perhaps out of a Democratic congresswoman's office, said well, it looks like he's going to pass. We're going to shove this lady out of the closet and basically identify her."

What happened in the meantime? On October 3, 2018, an FBI investigation turned up nothing to verify the claims of Ford and Swetnick and their stories collapsed in a malodorous cloud. Scarborough thereupon noted that he had recently been to some social events in DC, where he heard many people expressing doubt about the stories told by these supposed victims of abuse. "Quite a few people, that we talked to, and I think a lot of them were registered Democrats, raised questions about Dr. Ford's story," Scarborough said. "Now that's something in 24/7 news coverage, at least in mainstream media, you never hear anybody talk about. They won't talk about it. They feel that if anybody sticks their neck out and says they disbelieve any part of her story or talk about how there are no corroborating witnesses, well, they'll get absolutely slammed."

Scarborough continued his diatribe: “There has been the assumption that every single allegation was true.... Nobody had dared say, even the Republicans, that part of Dr. Ford’s story might just not add up.... I turned on all networks at all times and Brett Kavanaugh has been accused of being a serial rapist by columnists in national newspapers...the media has dropped the ball on this from the very beginning.”

This performance is mainly remarkable as an example of what journalist Matt Taibbi has called “bombholing,” a term he coined to describe the practice of splashing wild and unsubstantiated stories all over the media, only to send those same stories down the memory hole when they don’t pan out. Then you immediately distract viewers and readers with a new “bombshell” to make people forget the old “bombshell,” which was usually a dud. He writes, “News in the Trump years became a narrative drama, with each day advancing a tale of worsening political emergency, driven by subplots involving familiar casts of characters, in the manner of episodic television.... The innovation was to use banner headlines to saturate news cycles, often to the exclusion of nearly any other news, before moving to the next controversy so quickly that mistakes, errors, or rhetorical letdowns were memory-holed.”²⁶⁵

So, Joe Scarborough beamed out ludicrous claims to millions of viewers, and then, a few days later, he denounced the very tales he had so recklessly promoted.

But at least Scarborough paid some respect to the facts. To others, the obvious flimsiness of Ford’s case against Brett made no difference whatsoever. For example, Ana Marie Cox, once a respected DC journalist known as “Wonkette,” tweeted this: “We need to judge Brett Kavanaugh, not just by what he may or may not have done, but how he treats a woman’s pain. Will he take her pain seriously? Do the people interrogating her take her pain seriously?”²⁶⁶ The replies were scathing: “So even if he didn’t do anything to her, he still should be held accountable if her feelings get hurt.” “So it’s not what he may or may not have actually done that’s important but rather how he reacts to her feelz? Really? Translated: it’s a put-up job.” “What exactly is he supposed to do with a woman who may be entirely making up a story that can ruin his path to [the] Supreme Court....?? Take her to a ball game?”²⁶⁷

So no, to some partisan reporters, facts clearly did not matter.

On September 14, 2019, Mollie Hemingway obtained an early copy of *The Education of Brett Kavanaugh* by New York Times reporters Kate Kelly and Robin Pogrebin, which was scheduled to be published the following Tuesday. In doing so, she was able to preemptively firebomb the bogus story that was being sold by the authors.²⁶⁸

A Times story excerpted from the book and posted on September 14 claims that in the early 1980s, a woman at Yale University had been the victim of a sexual assault at the hands of Brett Kavanaugh.²⁶⁹ The only problem with this story was that the woman herself said she had no memory of the alleged incident. In reporting the story, Kelly and Pogrebin left out this fact.

*The Education of Brett Kavanaugh was an attempt by Kelly and Pogrebin, the Halberstam and Sheehan of the modern #MeToo New York Times, to stage their own coup against the Supreme Court. It was the final step in a sixteen-month effort to try and prevent Brett from becoming a Supreme Court Justice and to place a cloud over his head if he somehow managed to make it through—a goal outlined by Ford’s attorney in her comments quoted earlier.*²⁷⁰

According to Mollie Hemingway, “Robin Pogrebin engaged in questionable journalistic tactics to shape a false narrative against Kavanaugh by telling a source what to say and by asking sources to confirm information she herself had given them.”²⁷¹ One person Pogrebin approached was Karen Yarasavage, who had gone to Yale with Brett. Yarasavage said that Pogrebin had called her up as an old Yale friend but hadn’t noted that she was writing a hit piece on Brett. In a text message that was part of a judiciary report, Pogrebin tried to get Yarasavage to say that Debbie Ramirez, the Yale woman who had accused Brett of sexual assault, “became a different person” after the alleged incident and that Yarasavage, an independent, was politically motivated to defend Brett. The text reads:

Robin wanted me to go on record saying “she became a different person, a lot more liberal.” I said no, I have no idea if that is true, truly speculation. I told her I don’t want to be included at all in any way. Mind you, this “quote” came from her asking me why we aren’t in touch. I explained my last conversation with her was political and I’m not a very political person. I don’t want to read any of the articles because everything is taken apart and put together to sensationalize and

may not even read true in the end. I actually can't believe the New Yorker story ran. It really doesn't read well.²⁷²

Pogrebin and Kelly were caught because of Hemingway, whose sharp eye and access to the media managed to ruin their book several days before it was published. Pogrebin and Kelly were sandblasted on social media by everyone across the political and journalistic spectrum from The View and Morning Joe to Fox News. They became a joke.

As Hemingway reported, Pogrebin actually told one of Brett's former Yale classmates what to say. Ask yourself: What would have happened to Brett Kavanaugh had there been no rapid-response social media? What if there were no conservative journalist, no Mollie Hemingway to actually snag a copy of The Education of Brett Kavanaugh and report on its lies in real time?

Hemingway's daring and skill helped break a hundred-year string of victories in intervening to shape history by the Times. There may be no fully going back to the usual extortion and other underhanded tactics that the media used, although many will certainly try.

Meanwhile the hits keep coming.

Near the beginning of her recently published memoir, *Lady Justice: Women, the Law, and the Battle to Save America*, longtime Supreme Court reporter Dahlia Lithwick offers a remarkable paragraph in which she glowingly describes the feminist lawyer Roberta Kaplan. In this brief passage, alert readers can see everything that is hypocritical, devious and dishonorable about the American left.

Kaplan, the winning lawyer in the pathbreaking 2013 marriage equality case, *United States v. Windsor*, had devoted twenty-five years to a big-city law practice. Little did she know when she marched in the first Women's March in January 2017, that within months she'd be in federal court in Virginia, suing Nazis who violently invaded Charlottesville and defending female whistleblowers in a series of #MeToo lawsuits. (Kaplan would later resign from *Time's Up* over a conflict about work she did for Governor Andrew Cuomo.)²⁷³

Did you catch that last part? The parenthetical aside tucked in quietly so as not to raise too much attention? What, you may ask, was the nature of Ms. Kaplan’s “conflict”? Lithwick doesn’t elaborate.

But first a word about Lithwick herself.

In 2018, Dahlia Lithwick literally lost her mind over the Brett Kavanaugh nomination. She was so traumatized by the fact that Brett was not drawn and quartered based on a vague and totally unverified story from high school about alleged sexual misconduct, not to mention the wild tales of drugs and gang rapes circulated by a sociopath who now sits in prison, that she could not return to covering the court. Writing in Slate magazine, Lithwick announced that she was too traumatized to even go back to covering SCOTUS. The piece was headlined, WHY I HAVEN’T GONE BACK TO SCOTUS SINCE KAVANAUGH. The subtitle: “Some things are not worth getting over.”²⁷⁴

Lithwick’s traumatic memory of this event is that while Kavanaugh was “[a] man shouting about conspiracies and pledging revenge,” her fifteen-year-old son—who was watching the hearings at school—texted his mother “to ask if I was ‘perfectly safe’ in the Senate chamber. He was afraid for the judge’s mental health and my physical health.”²⁷⁵

This wildly exaggerated fear is presented as perfectly reasonable. Somehow we are supposed to believe that there was a real danger Brett Kavanaugh was going to lunge at Dahlia Lithwick in the Senate chamber and physically attack her on national TV.

Lithwick stands by this ridiculous story and plays it to the hilt, reiterating her fears at a book launch for Lady Justice. “It was beyond just a story,” she said. “There was some sense of menace, and I’m even going to say the word violence.”²⁷⁶

To recap: Brett was angry because the Left had falsely accused him of attempted rape. But he should have been more considerate of Dahlia Lithwick’s feelings. In her book she details this terrifying experience, and she also celebrates Roberta Kaplan, the crusading feminist lawyer who had to resign from Time’s Up due to an unspecified “conflict.”

So who is Roberta Kaplan, and what was the exact nature of her conflict?

From the New York Times:

The fallout from a damaging report that found Gov. Andrew Cuomo sexually harassed 11 women widened on Monday when Roberta A. Kaplan, a nationally prominent lawyer with ties to the governor, resigned from Time's Up, the organization founded by Hollywood women to fight sexual abuse and promote gender equality.

Ms. Kaplan, the chairwoman of Time's Up and the co-founder of its legal defense fund, was one of several prominent figures whom the report found to be involved in an effort to discredit one of Mr. Cuomo's alleged victims, and she has continuing legal ties to a former Cuomo aide accused of leading that effort.

The report from the state attorney general's office found that Ms. Kaplan had reviewed a draft of a disparaging op-ed letter that was aimed at attacking the character of Lindsey Boylan, a former Cuomo aide who was the first to publicly accuse him of sexual harassment.

The op-ed letter was never published. It was part of a broader effort in which Mr. Cuomo and his aides sought counsel from former administration officials including Alphonso David, the president of the Human Rights Campaign, the largest L.G.B.T.Q. political lobbying organization in the country; Tina Tchen, the chief executive of Time's Up; and the governor's brother, Chris Cuomo, an anchor on CNN.²⁷⁷

So Dahlia Lithwick was shaken so badly by the Kavanaugh hearing, which produced not the slightest evidence that Brett had ever even met Christine Blasey Ford, that she couldn't return to work. She in fact still agonizes about it

in (erroneous) detail to this day. Yet in Lady Justice, Lithwick praises Kaplan, who an official report “found to be involved in an effort to discredit one of [Andrew] Cuomo’s alleged victims.”²⁷⁸

I see. Nice work if you can get it.

But wait—there’s more. As part of her promotional tour, Lithwick did an extended interview with her old friend, Senator Al Franken, the former Saturday Night Live writer and best-selling author who resigned from the Senate in 2018 amid accusations of sexual misconduct. There were eight accusations in all, including one from Leeann Tweeden, a radio news anchor, who said that Franken groped and forcibly kissed her during a United Service Organizations (USO) tour in 2006. Tweeden says that Franken “aggressively stuck his tongue in my mouth” when the pair rehearsed a skit that featured a kiss.²⁷⁹ A photo emerged showing Franken looking at a camera while pretending to grab Tweeden’s breasts as she was sleeping on a military airplane.

Imagine Dahlia Lithwick’s reaction if a photo showing me or Brett, doing something similar, ever came out.

My favorite Franken moment occurred not on Saturday Night Live, but in an interview he did in 2021 with Jackie Calmes in which he revealed the dangerous totalitarianism that is at the heart of the American Stasi. When considering the amazing 2018 speech Senator Susan Collins gave in defense of Brett and due process, Franken dismissed it as “some convoluted thing where at the end it’s something about ‘the presumption of innocence.’”²⁸⁰

Stop and think about those words.

This is who they are. This is what they believe. Dahlia Lithwick’s “Lady Justice” is a Stasi goon with an eye on your high school friends—and a boot on your neck.

In their aftermath, the hearings continued to reverberate throughout popular

culture, including in films and novels. It is worth taking a look at some of these works to understand the way in which popular culture increasingly operates to support the Stasi narrative.

Consider *The Last Duel*, a 2021 movie from Matt Damon, Ben Affleck, and director Ridley Scott, a medieval #MeToo parable that seems directly inspired by the Kavanaugh hearings. An overly long but interesting film, its intent is clearly to valorize women, hammering home that they are always and everywhere truth tellers, and to make men look like liars and unruly apes.

It's Paris in the 1300s. Brave and serious knight Sir Jean de Carrouges (Matt Damon) goes away to war. In his absence, his wife Marguerite (Jodie Comer) is raped by Squire Jacques Le Gris (Adam Driver). Carrouges takes up his wife's cause, fighting (albeit for patriarchal reasons) against the misogyny and superstition of the time. Women are considered property, and it is widely believed that they will not conceive if they do not climax during sex with their husbands. The lascivious Count Pierre d'Alençon (Ben Affleck) tries to rule against Carrouges, but an appeal to the king results in a duel to the death.²⁸¹

The Last Duel, based on a true story, is adapted from Eric Jager's nonfiction book and is told Rashomon-style from the perspective of the three central characters. However, unlike the Akira Kurosawa classic, which intentionally fails to resolve the three competing narratives, in The Last Duel it is assumed—in fact it is announced on screen—that Marguerite's version is THE TRUTH. The only question is whether the men in her life, and the male-dominated society at large, can be induced to see it.

In her version, of course, Jean and Jacques are equally foolish and arrogant, clueless at running a farm, brutal and selfish, bad at sex, and habitually violent. The rape in this version unambiguously happened. The entire thing could be called Bad Will Hunting. Unsurprisingly, it was popular with critics and strongly appealed to affluent white liberals.

Novelists also were inspired by the Kavanaugh hearing. *The Smash-Up* by Ali Benjamin can be considered in two ways. In purely technical terms it is a magnificent achievement, a story where plot, characters, dialogue, and suspense work together to provide a richly engrossing reading experience. On a different level, *The Smash-Up* is a commentary on America's current political situation. It is in this second sense that the book misses.

Directly modeled for some reason on Ethan Frome, Edith Wharton's claustrophobic tale of domestic unhappiness in rural nineteenth-century New England, the book's protagonist Zenobia (Zo) Frome is an angry liberal, consumed by free-floating terror about the election of Donald Trump.²⁸² "Jolted into activism by the 2016 election," according to the publisher's description, Zo transforms her family home "into the headquarters for the local resistance, turning their comfortable decades-long marriage inside-out."²⁸³

Years before, Zo and her husband Ethan had left Brooklyn for the small town of Starkfield, Massachusetts. Ethan is living off checks from a successful marketing start-up he co-founded in the 1990s. Zo, once a promising documentary filmmaker, has become not just active but crazed. The Smash-Up begins with a scientific discussion of how hundreds of years of shifting tectonic plates can eventually cause an earthquake. The election of Trump was an earthquake that Zo and other progressives never saw coming.

The Smash-Up takes place during the confirmation battle of Brett Kavanaugh. Zo has pronounced Kavanaugh guilty, and she is consumed with her feminist women's group, ironically named All Them Witches. The Witches meet in the Fromes' living room "to make posters and write postcards and process the dumpster fire that is the news these days."²⁸⁴ Zo spends a lot of time lecturing representatives from companies that have any whiff of sexism, racism, or "transphobia" and taunting cops to arrest her. Meanwhile, Alex, their eleven-year-old daughter, has severe ADHD and needs constant supervision.

For most of The Smash-Up, readers are led to believe that (like Wharton's Ethan Frome) this is a story about a struggling marriage. Zo seems to be having a nervous breakdown, her increasingly reckless behavior becoming more and more a danger to herself and those around her. Because she is so outraged, she can lie, drive recklessly, and treat her husband and everyone else like garbage. Because, as everyone knows, Trump supporters—people who fly flags on pickup trucks!—are evil incarnate. Her antipathy toward Trump and Kavanaugh results in everything from the policing of other people's speech to the loud conviction of other people without due process.

For much of the novel Benjamin is brave enough to make The Smash-Up a satire of the hectoring and didactic nature of modern progressive activism. The reader empathizes with Ethan, who has to take over running the household as Zo becomes, in Ethan's phrase, "a rage squatter."

Ethan represents the bemused common sense of Gen Xer, a generation that isn't necessarily conservative but has a low tolerance for causes and political true believers. When Zo's declaration that Kavanaugh is guilty is uncritically repeated by their impressionable daughter Alex, Ethan thinks about pushing back: "Ethan feels like he should explain about innocent-until-proven-guilty, about due process, but he thinks about all the women in the Capitol rotunda, those BELIEVE WOMEN signs he's been seeing everywhere, all the stories that have come out, one after another, over the last few years."

Alex is obsessed with the Broadway musical *Wicked*, whose main character is a witch. The witch motif, touched on frequently here, leads the reader to think that *The Smash-Up* is going to offer commentary on contemporary witch hunts, from cancel culture to the Kavanaugh hearings.

Zo's anger is so brittle that Ethan finds himself attracted to Maddy, the college-age nanny they have hired to take care of Alex. (This too parallels the plot of *Ethan Frome*.) When Zo gets pulled over for rageful driving and calls the nice policeman, who simply wants to issue her a warning, a racist, the story seems to pulsate toward a reckoning. Zo lies about her arrest and becomes a cause celebrity among All Them Witches and other lefties in Starkfield. They sweep Zo into the Black Lives Matter cause and plan a rally.

Then *The Smash-Up* takes an unexpected turn. An obscure minor character who only appears in brief scenes shows up. A young white man who works at a UPS store and drives a pickup draped with flags and MAGA stickers appears at the rally and proceeds to drive his vehicle directly into the crowd. Benjamin's carefully plotted domestic drama is suddenly up in smoke as Ethan sees a member of his family, his daughter, get seriously hurt. Yes, Zo has been vindictive, gossipy, cruel to innocent strangers, and willing to convict the innocent without evidence. Yet in the end she is right, because the threat from Trump is so dire that it requires resistance by Any Means Necessary. The town comes together, Zo gets a book deal, and Alex recovers in the hospital.

There is one scene in *The Smash-Up* in which Zo and her witches seem briefly unsure of themselves. Kavanaugh and Ford have testified. Then, suddenly, there is quiet. "A third act" is missing, the women think—a conclusion, something that will wrap the whole thing up in a tight bow.²⁸⁵ They don't for a second stop to think that Brett might be innocent, let alone that he might have been the victim of a campaign of opposition research, political skullduggery, and outright lies.

Other novels came out that were inspired by the events of 2018. There was *Something Happened to Ail Greenleaf* by Hayley Krischer and *True Story: A Novel* by Kate Reed Petty. In *Ali Greenleaf* a boy is guilty of rape and protected by his wealthy and connected friends.²⁸⁶ *True Story* is fresher, offering a story in which two boys brag about having sex with an unconscious girl when in reality one boy tried to rape her but was prevented by the other.²⁸⁷

Later would come *All the Dirty Secrets* by Aggie Blum Thompson, a thriller inspired by the events in Washington in the fall of 2018. It dramatizes “Beach Week,” the annual summer exodus of DC’s private school kids to the Eastern Shore for seven days of drinking, sunning, and debauchery. One such week in 1994 ended tragically when Liza and her best friends Nikki, Shelby, and Whitney, all students at the elite Washington Prep, went to the shore and one of them drowned.²⁸⁸

Now Liza has her own daughter, Zoe, who secretly slips off to Dewey Beach in Delaware for her own Beach Week celebration. Again, a girl drowns. I hope I’m not giving too much away in revealing that the villains in *All the Dirty Secrets* are Washington Prep guys, just like in the two other novels inspired by the Kavanaugh battle, *The Smash-Up* and *Something Happened to Ali Greenleaf*. In these books men are mostly bad or stupid and the women are simultaneously clueless and helpless.

To me, Ford was dramatized most accurately not by these modern feminists but by the women from the film noir era of Hollywood. Like Kathie Moffat in the classic movie *Out of the Past*, Ford was not what the public saw on TV. According to her high school yearbook and the people who knew her, “Dr. Ford” was an enthusiastic partier when she was younger, someone who also, according to an ex-boyfriend, gave lessons on how to foil a polygraph exam and ran up hundreds of dollars on a credit card that was not hers.²⁸⁹

Here is how film historian Julie Grossman defines the femme fatale: “Ostensibly the villain, but also a model of female power, poise, and intelligence, the femme fatale embodies Hollywood’s contradictory attitudes toward ambitious

women.”²⁹⁰ Femme fatales are usually the undoing of the poor men who encounter them. In her book *The Femme Fatale*, Grossman “examines classic film noir femmes fatales like Barbara Stanwyck in *Double Indemnity*, as well as postmodern revisions in films like *Basic Instinct* and *Memento*.”²⁹¹

A picture of Ford as a shrewd, conniving actress and opposition researcher is more interesting, and far more accurate, than the ingénue created by the media.

It’s a dour contrast to the tough, vivid, and complex women in film noir. In film noir, the bad guys are often women: Phyllis Dietrichson in *Double Indemnity*, Kathie Moffat in *Out of the Past*, Gilda Mundson in *Gilda*, Brigid O’Shaughnessy in *The Maltese Falcon*. The 1950 noir *Gun Crazy* was originally titled *Deadly is the Female*. These women are not the saints of modern #MeToo movies; they are brilliant, conniving, sarcastic, and sometimes downright evil. In other words, they are much more like real people.

The smart, sassy, and independent women in films like *Black Widow*, *Accused of Murder*, *A Kiss Before Dying*, and *Party Girl* more accurately reflect the girls I knew growing up in the 1980s. They could savagely dress you down—and in public—or simply meet your gaze dead even and hit you with an “I don’t think so.”

These black widows have been replaced by hysterics like Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, who howl at small provocations and don’t have the guile to get one over on their dumb male marks.

With her scrubbed digital past, baby girl voice, vague story—including suppressed tales of a wild youth—and claims by an ex-boyfriend that she is a fraud and a liar, Christine Blasey Ford was a film noir femme fatale come to life. Many of her supporters, including Koegler and central-casting villain Michael Avenatti, have stories that are right out of the pages of a James M. Cain crime novel.

However, for me the form of popular art that best captures the cultural mood of the Kavanaugh battle is the great French film *Panique*, which the Criterion Collection reissued in the fall of 2018 in a beautifully restored edition. In his review of the 1946 film, critic Bilge Ebiri observes that mob behavior is often an expression not of panic but of a “monstrous ecstasy.”²⁹² Not just a rabble of hysterics fueled by hate, mobs are driven by a religious fervor that provides a

high. Mob rage is not a burden for the perpetrators; it's a blissful drug.

Directed by Julien Duvivier and adapted from Georges Simenon's 1933 novel *Mr. Hire's Engagement*, the black-and-white *Panique* is a sublime expression of French poetic realism as well as an early taste of what would become the film noir genre. Simenon's novel was inspired by the Belgian author's memory, while a young journalist in Liege, of seeing a group of drunks savagely turn on a German man they accused of being a spy, chasing the man onto a rooftop.

Duvivier went to work in Hollywood during World War II. When he returned to France, he found that he was resented as one who had "abandoned" the country during the Occupation.²⁹³ The French people were also bitter toward many who had stayed; distrust and paranoia were common as the country attempted to come to terms with who had submitted to the Nazis, who had fought, and who had fled.

Yet while *Panique* is a commentary on a particular place and time, its message is archetypal and timeless. Without due process, without law, without the presumption of innocence, people submerged in an environment of hysteria quickly devolve into wolves. Members of the press are usually the worst offenders, taking sides and fueling the carnival atmosphere rather than searching for the truth, which usually comes out long after it's too late.

Panique takes place in the placid suburban Paris neighborhood of Villejuif. An elderly woman, Mademoiselle Noblet, is found murdered, her body discovered by a worker from a traveling carnival that is setting up its tents in the town. A handsome, well-dressed man named Alfred (Paul Bernard) takes charge of the scene while waiting for police. Later Alfred is joined by his girlfriend Alice (Viviane Romance) who has just spent several months in prison taking the rap for a crime Alfred committed. While Alfred is blankly criminal, Alice is more sinister—she's duplicitous, conniving, and malicious. Alice won't hesitate to destroy an innocent man if it gets her what she wants.

Alice discovers that Monsieur Hire, a tall, bearded, and eccentric man who lives in an apartment directly across a narrow alley from her, knows that Alfred is responsible for the murder. Alice and Alfred set out to frame Hire, a task that turns out to be easy as the good people of Villejuif devour rumor, innuendo, and falsehood. In the eyes of the increasingly feverish town gaggle, Hire's oddities become indictments. He lives alone and isn't married. He asks the butcher for his

meat to be extra bloody. He moonlights as “Doctor Varga,” an astrologer and spiritual adviser who gives advice gleaned from occult texts. Hire also has a supercilious way about him, is somewhat antisocial, and is both educated and physically intimidating. These traits become enough to convict him.

Hidden from the slowly growing mob is Hire’s true desire: he is a lonely man who pines for a lost love, a heartache that makes him vulnerable to having sentimental feelings for Alice. When Hire tries to warn Alice about how dangerous Alfred is, a flash of conscience is revealed on her face. It quickly vanishes, and she conspires with Alfred to plant evidence in Hire’s apartment. Once the specious story gets out, Panique drives toward its ghastly conclusion. The carnival, usually an atmosphere of fun, becomes a maelstrom of anger and accusation where the suspicious townspeople coalesce into a flowing river of rage. The fuse has been lit, the police are three steps behind, and a collective madness has obliterated any hope of a fair hearing.

In a vertiginous and terrifying climax, Hire is hunted through the town square and then to the rooftops. Those who know human nature or have spent any time on social media won’t be surprised that it doesn’t end well. Crazy mobs are out for blood and usually aren’t satisfied until they get it.

While my Georgetown Prep classmates were supportive, Prep as an institution often seemed ambivalent—that is to say, ambivalent about me, not Brett. I had written two books about my experiences as a young Catholic and described some of the liberal craziness that had become part of the Catholic Church beginning in the 1960s. It didn’t surprise me when I heard that there were members of the faculty who wouldn’t mind if I was banned from campus.

Yet what was happening to me was such a violent, traumatizing attack that I assumed my old school would recognize the difference between writing a book that was critical of some of the more liberal tendencies of the Jesuits and attempting to destroy someone’s life.

But while Prep responded strongly to attacks in the media, I never heard from

any former or current faculty members. I always found it ironic and telling that some of my strongest supporters were not from established institutions like the Republican Party or Georgetown Prep but were regular people like Rick and the working-class guys I knew who worked at car shops and places like Home Depot.

Then there was Lina, a beautiful model I had photographed at Nationals Park in Washington. She was part German-Jewish and part Argentinian, her family's having fled the Nazis for Central America in the 1930s. She was very intelligent, extremely sexy, and had a great sense of humor. During the shoot we quickly became friends, and we remained so afterwards. While Georgetown Prep was dealing with the media and the Republican Party was wishing I was on the moon, Lina texted me. Evidently she had been drawn into the maelstrom by oppo researchers and activists who were trying to get her to turn on me.

"Oh my God. THEY ARE TRYING TO MURDER YOU."

"I know."

"Are you OK?"

"Yes."

"THIS IS INSANE I AM DEFENDING YOU I HAVE PEOPLE TELLING ME TO SAY THINGS THAT AREN'T TRUE."

"I know."

"THEY ARE TRYING TO KILL YOU I FEEL SO BAD."

"I know."

"What horrible people."

It was a more perceptive insight than anything you would hear from a politician or anyone in the media.

I also found support from people from the past—including an old teacher who had passed away years earlier. His voice came to me through an old letter I found pressed between Mencken's *Prejudices* and Merton's *No Man Is an Island*

when I was cleaning some books out of an old closet.

As soon as I saw the handwriting on the envelope, I felt the tears welling up in my eyes. The letter was from Father Hart—my favorite teacher from Georgetown Prep.

When my sophomore year of high school ended in the summer of 1981, Father Hart was transferred to Georgetown University, a few miles down the road in Washington. I savored our final days together, each of us prodding the other to take in a recommended work of art. He was insistent that I see the film *Gandhi*. I was appalled that he had never read *The Lord of the Rings*.

At the end of the year he wrote me a letter, encouraging my pursuits in reading and writing and developing a deeper love of the Lord.

Then I did something that surprised him—I wrote him back. I had a question: What does one say to Jesus after receiving Holy Communion? I had seen people bowed in deep prayer. What were they saying? I only knew the remote recitation that had been taught to generations of Catholics. I also offered an exegesis on *Long Distance Voyager*, the new Moody Blues album that I loved. The big hit off the record was “The Voice,” which talked about existential loneliness and finding a holy voice to guide you through life.

Father Hart wrote me back in a letter postmarked July 20, 1981—the letter I found in my closet. I instantly recognized his small, unbelievably neat cursive writing and the envelope from THE JESUIT COMMUNITY at GEORGETOWN UNIVERSITY.

In the letter, Hart notes that I was starting to drill down and ask some serious questions about the meaning of life. “I guess you’ve found out that there is more ordinary labor involved in education than you thought,” he wrote. He then addressed my question about the Eucharist:

You know, the reason I like the lyrics to good rock songs is because some of the most important truths are also the simplest. Take the line from “The Voice,” that Moodies song you like [that talks about people’s tendency to dream]...It’s amazing! Heraclitus, one of the ancient Greeks, penned thoughts very much like that. To him, mankind wandered in confusion because all were dreamers,

wrapped in fantasies spun out of a small vision of things.... He considered his vocation as a philosopher to be that of waking men up to the One Light of wakefulness—he believed “There was a party going on!” and everybody was missing it.

Now the trouble with talking about the Eucharist is that everybody wakes up to it in his or her own way. What do you say after receiving communion? Well, there are certain polite, respectful formalities that we observe when we meet someone, and there are definitely prayers that are good, pearls of prayer, formed over centuries. But no one else can speak for you in this case. It’s like when you meet a girl—you can’t be too worried about what you’re going to say. That puts all your attention on yourself and breaks the live connection. And a lot depends on how she responds, doesn’t it?

Now, having said that, I’ll say this. Listen to the Eucharistic Prayer. See if you notice anything. Don’t read it, just listen to it. You might notice a phrase like “For our sake he opened his arms on the cross; He put an end to death and revealed the Resurrection.” See, the Eucharist is an action. It’s done by Christ alone! All we can do is join in. We join the body of Christ; we take up the gifts. That’s us.

So try actively listening to the prayers. Then you might just quietly ask for some understanding of what is happening as the sacrament takes place. Just act reverent, and if you want a prayer to say, and sometimes that’s the best thing to do, you can use this little litany. Above all, take an attitude of faith, since faith is the opening eye....

I was your age when the Moodies put out “Go Now,” their first big hit!

I’ll call you later in the week and suggest a day for you to come down here.

Meanwhile, be at peace.

Father Thomas Hart S.J.

Father Hart died of a heart attack in 2005. He was fifty-six. The obituary in the Baltimore Sun captured him well. According to fellow Jesuit Eugene M. Geinzer, he “had a questioning mind...It was said he was either going to become an atheist or a Jesuit.... Greg profoundly loved reading theology. He stayed up most nights until 2 a.m. every night reading the newest and the best.”²⁹⁴ In the December before his death, Father Hart flew to India to spend a month in prayer with a Jesuit master. His brother said the experience “thrilled” him.²⁹⁵

One of my final memories of Father Hart was when I was a senior at Prep and he had been gone for a couple years. The news came out that his mother had passed away. A small group of about ten of us drove from Washington to Baltimore to attend the service. Dressed in our blazers and ties, we all lined up dutifully in the back rows. Father Hart seemed genuinely moved that we had come. I examined the beautiful, sorrowful intelligence of his face—Camus in grief. I approached him after the service. “Father Hart,” I said. “All Things Must Pass.” It was the name of one of our favorite George Harrison songs. He looked at me with the understanding that I was not just quoting a rock song. I was acknowledging a deep truth about God’s universe and the reality that we are all passing through.

He met my eyes with what I can only describe as profound brotherly love.

“Amen,” he said.

Recently I came across yet another missive from the late Father Hart. This one is from the summer of 1983, when I was heavily into the Police and their charismatic leader, Sting, whom I considered a brilliant intellectual. A cassette of Synchronicity was my constant companion that summer, and I was increasingly rejecting Christianity as I embraced the teachings of the enlightened Sting. I read all the thinkers referenced on Synchronicity: Carl Jung, Paul Bowles, and the environmental nuts Sting promoted who were already preaching about the climate apocalypse.

Then I made the mistake of challenging my former teacher. I wrote him a note boasting of my newfound wisdom learned at the feet of the Police and added a sarcastic question: was Father Hart still going to mass? The implication was clear: the Catholic mass was for morons and losers. It wasn't cool.

I mentioned that I had seen the film *Gandhi*, which he had strongly recommended, and said I was impressed by the Indian leader's courage and activism. I then closed with some words about *The Lord of the Rings*, the Tolkien masterpiece that both of us admired.

A few weeks later, I received a reply.

This new letter was a response to my taunts, my loss of faith, and my newfound guru, Sting.

Dear Mark,

I watched the "Synchronicity" concert on HBO the other night. I'm sorry to have to tell you that I was disappointed in Sting, though I thought the other two guys in the band were outstanding. I am afraid that your hero was a bit burnt out, perhaps from the bizarre lifestyle that superstars can get into. Especially when they are touring. Sting looked bloated and acted sloppy. It seemed to me that for the most part he was not interested enough in his songs to try and do them with all his attention. I wonder if Sting hasn't been slipping on the Ring lately—and you know what happens to those who try to use the Ring.

Just before sitting down to write you I listened to a few numbers from the tape you made—songs like Don McLean's "Crossroads" and George Harrison's "Beware of Darkness"—and they sent me on a train of thought—about pain. It just so happens that one of the songs Sting did well was "King of Pain." Then there's the piece by Don McLean [in "Crossroads" asking if someone can heal his pain.] What is this pain they are talking about, Mark? Do you know? I know a little bit about my own, and I know that everyone has it—but I know that each person's pain is as personal as their name. And I know that it's worse to try and

cover it and hide from it than accept it.

I was very happy that you saw the movie Gandhi, and even happier that you were impressed by it. Gandhi could live as he did because deep down he had accepted the pain without protest. And he could do so because he found a Life strong enough to absorb the pain without needing to resist—and being able to live that way is what I call salvation. In case you're wondering, I am driving at something. It's the Eucharist.

I was fascinated that you asked me if I was still going to mass—and because of that I can't help mentioning it in connection with these other things. How do you think Gandhi could ever walk around the way he did and see people as he saw them and treat them as he did? For myself I am sure it was not simply because he was a very strong individual with great moral character. I am sure that it was because he was in touch with God. Like Jesus, it wasn't just at his death that he offered the sacrifice of his life.

That is the way he lived, and the way we are called to live—not necessarily on the heroic scale of Gandhi, but in the way we treat ordinary people. To live that way is to offer a sacrifice to God—it is what the mass calls being a “living sacrifice of praise.” The very action of living and dying that way is what is celebrated in the Eucharist—and if you know that and look quietly and with respect into the celebration itself, you may find there a source of strength more surprising than anything you've experienced.

My experience is that it grows on you gradually. If you accuse me of preaching I can answer that you asked for it by wondering out loud if I was going to mass.

That's called being taken to school. What a blessing that the Lord has brought Father Hart back to me in these letters.

Oh, and for the record, Synchronicity still holds up as a great record, although my favorite songs on it have changed. I now prefer “Miss Gradenko,” which mockingly depicts life inside a cruel and lifeless totalitarian state.

Father Hart was a priest, but he was also a freethinker and, in his own way, a rebel. It’s not surprising that we bonded over rock and roll. Rock music always had a reputation for freedom, in fact a freedom so excessive it can turn to tragedy. The culture had always been filled with sex, drugs, booze, reckless behavior, and benders that went on for days (or even years). Yet the music also came with a bracing fearlessness in addressing sex, politics, and the subconscious, no matter where the quest for anger on those topics took the musicians. The best artists second-guessed the liberalism that was making their lifestyles possible.

It’s ironic that in an age of streaming where millions of songs are available, the range of topics that are allowed to be discussed is shrinking. How different it was not that many years ago. The Beatles experimented with LSD but also complained about the taxman. Neil Young famously wrote about the four dead students gunned down at Kent State, but he also praised Ronald Reagan. The Rolling Stones offered gritty, blues-inspired songs that expressed feelings of carnality and described the grit of urban life with a frankness that would not be possible today. They recently removed “Brown Sugar,” an antislavery anthem, from their concert playlists. Our media and cultural Stasi don’t comprehend painting a vivid and ugly picture about an abominable sin to criticize that same sin.

Closer to my own era, the punk rock of the 1970s and 1980s was about questioning liberalism as much as any vision of “social justice.” In a fascinating piece in the Washington Examiner, Daniel Wattenberg, who had been part of the New York punk scene in the 1970s, describes it well:

New York punks were unapologetic about their comfortable suburban origins, playful and irreverent in tone, and pretty affirmative about modern American life. Indeed, in many ways, New York punk represented a first skirmish within American popular culture with the then-gathering forces of political correctness.

He goes on:

A small but very influential segment of the punk community...explicitly rejected at one time or another just about every one of the reverse pieties then associated with the Left: anti-commercialism, anti-Americanism, reverse racism, you name it. This was coupled with an assault on the stale residue of the sixties counterculture, the whole sleepy, slit-eyed, vegetative, sexually, intellectually, and emotionally subdued, value-neutral, tie-dyed, and forever-fried cannabis cult that worked its way through suburban basements and college dorm rooms in the seventies.²⁹⁶

This was true of the scene when I was a college student in Washington, DC, in the 1980s. My friends and I were punk fans, and a lot of it had to do with the ability of the bands to question not only Reagan's America, but also Manhattan's and Hollywood's as well. There was also the sheer fun of it; I worked at a club, and we'd have to serve beer in plastic cups when the Ramones played because the fans got so rowdy. My favorite band, the Replacements, ridiculed androgyny and blasted corporate MTV as fake and boring.

Johnny Ramone once said, "People drift towards liberalism at a young age, and I always hope they change when they see how the world really is."²⁹⁷ Ian Curtis, the singer of the seminal band Joy Division, voted for Margaret Thatcher in 1979. Tony Hadley, the singer of Spandau Ballet, also supported Thatcher and describes his politics as "one nation conservatism."²⁹⁸

The point of rock was not to settle one side of a binary, with Communists on one side and Fascists on the other. The joy was in having an active and intelligent mind capable of criticizing things that would fall on any side of the political or cultural fence. Elvis Costello was no John Bircher, but he was happy to call out

the utopian cant of the hippies. In his song “The Other Side of Summer,” Costello, in a snarky reference to John Lennon’s song “Imagine,” laughed at the idea of a millionaire’s singing about wanting no possessions.

In 2018, Washington Post music critic Chris Richards argued that musicians should censor themselves in deference to prevailing political orthodoxies. He described a band who wanted to cover a song originally played by black artists. They decided not to, a move praised by Richards: “A band of white indie-rockers performing the songs of a black R&B singer? No way. It would be seen as cultural appropriation.” Richards writes that “as badly as I wanted to hear their covers they were right” to not attempt the song.²⁹⁹

It’s hard to imagine anything more antithetical to the spirit of rock and roll, or to freedom itself.

It’s January 20, 2021, the night before my mother’s funeral. I get a call from Brett—now Supreme Court Justice Kavanaugh. “I’m so sorry to hear about your mom,” he says. “Everybody loved her.” Then this: “She never got mad,” he said, “even when we were in high school and I’d call your house fifty times a week.” We both laugh.

The telepathy that we have, that all old friends have with each other, is there. It’s not the time or the place to go into detail about what happened to me—to us. It’s not the time or place to name the dragon. There’s just too much there. Still, Brett shows his love the way he always has, in a way that is there but different from my loud, direct, emotional way: “I’m glad to hear that you’re OK.”

I am.

Before hanging up a line comes to me. It’s something one of our teachers said at a wild bachelor party we held for him.

“Never let the spirit of Prep die.”

After the funeral mass there is an after-party at a restaurant in DC. It's just a few blocks from the theater where, forty years ago, we all went to see *The Empire Strikes Back* and then had a party at my parents' house. I can't help but think about Pat Buchanan's sentiment about Washington's Catholic ghetto: No matter where you go or what you do in life, these are always your people. We were baptized and confirmed and married by the same priests who are now burying our parents.³⁰⁰

Fletch and a few other Prep guys are at the funeral and the afterparty. There's a buffet of scallops and potatoes and green beans and the beer is flowing and people are talking and laughing and reconnecting. After a few hours, as things are winding down, Fletch pulls me aside. "I have to show you something," he says. "It involves Kavanaugh and it's pretty explosive."

I follow him out to the parking garage. In a private, empty corner on the fourth floor, we come up to his large maroon Ford SUV. Then he reemerges with a manila envelope. Inside that is a smaller five-by-seven envelope, and inside that is a photograph.

"Here's my retirement fund," Fletch says. "I'm thinking of sending it to TMZ."

Fletch slips out the photograph. I find myself face-to-face with ten naked backsides. It is a photograph of ten teenagers in the middle distance at a pool party, and they are mooning the camera. You could not see any faces.

"This is the game changer," he whispers. "It was taken in the 1980s."

There are a few brief seconds when I examine the picture.

Then Fletch and I look at each other and burst out laughing.

It had been a joke. That is to say, Fletch had indeed taken the picture at a party when we were in high school, but there was no telling who was in the shot. It may have even been guys from a different school.

We had reached an absolute and utter dead-end level of absurdity in the Kavanaugh witch hunt. We were at the point where a silly picture of some teenagers mooning a camera thirty years ago could conceivably be entered into the congressional record and caponized against us. Despite surviving, we hadn't really won. We were now living under the American Stasi.

“Hey, let’s go to the beach,” Fletch says. “Let’s get out of DC for a few days.”

He looks at me, sensing I’m uncertain.

“Let’s do it old school, Judgie. Just say fuck it and start to drive.”

Yes.

Then we’re both in the car, pulling away from Washington.

“I think I need this,” I say.

“No worries, buddy,” Fletch says. “The class of 1983 doesn’t leave brothers on the field.”

ENDNOTES

■

1Emily Schultheis, “As Germany’s Secret-Police Archive Shuttters, Reckoning for Its Victims Continues,” National Geographic, August 3, 2021, <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/culture/article/germanys-secret-police-archive-shuttters-reckoning-for-victims-continues>.

2This and the preceding four quotations are all from Schultheis, “Germany’s Secret-Police Archive.”

3Ryan Grim, “Dianne Feinstein Withholding Brett Kavanaugh Document from Fellow Judiciary Committee Democrats,” Intercept, September 12, 2018, <https://theintercept.com/2018/09/12/brett-kavanaugh-confirmation-dianne-feinstein>.

4Nicholas Fandos and Michael S. Schmidt, “Letter Claims Attempted Assault by a Teenage Brett Kavanaugh,” New York Times, September 14, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/14/us/politics/kavanaugh-assault-allegation-letter.html>.

5John McCormack, “Kavanaugh Classmate Names in Letter Strongly Denies Allegations of Misconduct,” Washington Examiner, September 14, 2018, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/kavanaugh-classmate-named-in-letter-strongly-denies-allegations-of-misconduct> (brackets in original).

6Fandos and Schmidt, “Letter Claims Attempted Assault.”

7Fandos and Schmidt, “Letter Claims Attempted Assault.”

8Emma Brown, “California Professor, Writer of Confidential Brett Kavanaugh Letter, Speaks Out about Her Allegation of Sexual Assault,” Washington Post, September 16, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/california-professor-writer-of-confidential-brett-kavanaugh-letter-speaks-out-about-her-allegation-of-sexual-assault/2018/09/16/46982194-b846-11e8-94eb-3bd52dfe917b_story.html.

9This and the preceding four quotations are all from Brown, “California Professor Speaks Out.”

10Barbara “Biz” Van Gelder, “Brett Kavanaugh Confirmation,” email, on Mark Judge statement, sent September 18, 2018, to Charles E. Grassley and Dianne Feinstein, retrieved from Committee on the Judiciary, PDF, [https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2018-09-18%20Judge%20to%20Grassley,%20Feinstein%20\(Kavanaugh%20Nomination\)](https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/imo/media/doc/2018-09-18%20Judge%20to%20Grassley,%20Feinstein%20(Kavanaugh%20Nomination))

11Rebecca Nelson, “A Writer Mined His ’80s Adolescence in the D.C. Suburbs. Then Came the Kavanaugh Hearings,” Washington Post, October 22, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/lifestyle/magazine/a-writer-mined-his-80s-adolescence-in-the-dc-suburbs-then-came-the-kavanaugh-hearings/2018/10/19/3170fb70di-c8ad-11e8-b1ed-1d2d65b86d0c_story.html.

12Nelson, “A Writer Mined.”

13Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., “Step Eleven,” in Twelve Steps and Twelve Traditions (New York: Alcoholics Anonymous World Services, Inc., 2021), 96–105, PDF, retrieved from <https://www.aa.org/twelve-steps-twelve-traditions>.

14Eyewitness News ABC7NY, “Senate Committee Vote on Kavanaugh Confirmation,” from Senate Judiciary Committee hearing for the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh, September 28, 2018, YouTube video, 4:41:57, streamed live September 28, 2018, https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Swhe5g5i_CA&t=2640s.

15Saturday Night Live, “Kavanaugh Hearing Cold Open - SNL,” from Saturday Night Live, season 44, episode 1, “Adam Driver,” directed by Don Roy King, written by Michael Che, Colin Jost, and Kent Sublette, 1:30:00, aired September 29, 2018, on NBC, YouTube video, 13:04, September 30, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VRJecfRxbr8>.

16This and the preceding quotation are both from Saturday Night Live, “Kavanaugh Hearing Cold Open.”

17“Ford ‘Wasn’t Clear’ Committee Offered California Interview in lieu of Public Washington Hearing,” Committee on the Judiciary, October 2, 2018, <https://www.judiciary.senate.gov/press/rep/releases/ford-wasnt-clear-committee-offered-california-interview-in-lieu-of-public-washington-hearing>.

18Tucker Carlson, “Tucker Carlson: Is Ford’s Kavanaugh Story Rooted in a ‘Recovered’ Memory? It’s Not the Only Fair Question to Be Asked,” Fox News, October 4, 2018, adapted from Tucker Carlson Tonight, featuring Tucker Carlson, 40:40, aired October 3, 2018, on Fox News Channel, <https://www.foxnews.com/opinion/tucker-carlson-is-fords-kavanaugh-story->

rooted-in-a-recovered-memory-its-not-the-only-fair-question-to-be-asked.

19Ian Shapira, “Celebrating Kegs and Insulting Girls: Inside Mark Judge’s 1980s Georgetown Prep Underground Paper,” Washington Post, October 5, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/celebrating-kegs-and-insulting-girls-inside-mark-judges-1980s-georgetown-prep-underground-paper/2018/10/04/9e4e34a4-c729-11e8-b1ed-1d2d65b86d0c_story.html.

20MSNBC, “Why Wouldn’t Brett Kavanaugh Want the FBI to Investigate? | Velshi & Ruhle | MSNBC,” from Velshi & Ruhle, featuring Ali Velshi and Stephanie Ruhle, on MSNBC, YouTube video, 10:42, September 20, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=W9Yxn48K7kk&t=459s>.

21Avi Selk, “What the Man Accused of Being Part of Kavanaugh’s Alleged Sexual Assault Had to Say about Women’s Sexuality,” Washington Post, September 18, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/arts-and-entertainment/wp/2018/09/17/what-the-man-accused-of-helping-kavanaugh-assault-a-woman-wrote-about-female-sexuality>.

22All yearbook quotes taken from personal documents.

23Alana Goodman, “Exclusive: ‘A School Swimming in Alcohol,’ Beach Parties, Sex and Even a Stripper - Inside Brett Kavanaugh’s Elite Education, by the Friend Accused of Being Part of ‘Drunken Sex Attack,’” Daily Mail, September 17, 2018, <https://www.dailymail.co.uk/news/article-6177809/School-swimming-alcohol-beach-parties-sex-STRIPPER-Brett-Kavanaughs-high-school.html>.

24Robin Pogrebin and Kate Kelly, “Chapter 10,” in *The Education of Brett Kavanaugh: An Investigation* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2019), Kindle.

25“The Queen’s Ace,” *New Republic*, May 6, 2008, <https://newrepublic.com/article/60867/the-queens-ace>. The information in the preceding five sentences is also taken from “The Queen’s Ace.”

26Carla Marinucci, “Democrats’ ‘Dr. Death’ Team Can’t Lose — for Now,” *San Francisco Chronicle*, November 27, 2014, on SFGATE.com, <https://www.sfgate.com/politics/article/Democrats-Dr-Death-team-can-t-lose-5921900.php>.

27Fox News, “Tucker: The Rise and Fall of the Creepy Porn Lawyer,” from *Tucker Carlson Tonight*, featuring Tucker Carlson, on Fox News Channel, YouTube video, 6:17, May 22, 2019, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=U950t7M1Tbg>.

28Michael Avenatti (@MichaelAvenatti), Twitter, September 22, 2018, 8:09 p.m., <https://twitter.com/michaelavenatti/status/1043653635282952192>.

29Michael Avenatti (@MichaelAvenatti), Twitter, September 22, 2018, 8:18 p.m., <https://twitter.com/MichaelAvenatti/status/1043655749220544512>.

30LiveNOW from FOX, “Breaking: Michael Avenatti Says His Client Can Sink Judge Brett Kavanaugh,” comments by Michael Avenatti, on Fox News Channel, YouTube video, 6:23, September 24, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=LMpAAvVi4d8&t=191s>.

31Sarah Fitzpatrick, Rich Schapiro, and Adiel Kaplan, “Kavanaugh Accuser Julie Swetnick Alleges He ‘Spiked’ Punch at Parties So Intoxicated Women Could Be Raped,” NBC News, September 26, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/supreme-court/woman-alleges-kavanaugh-spiked-punch-parties-so-intoxicated-girls-could-n912491>.

32Michael Kunzelman, Michael Biesecker, and Martha Mendoza, “3rd Kavanaugh Accuser Has History of Legal Disputes,” Associated Press, September 30, 2018, <https://apnews.com/article/lawsuits-ap-top-news-courts-sexual-misconduct-north-america-bccc4dd598df4e71bbf6c40ff4830373>.

33GOP War Room, “NBC News: Kavanaugh Accuser Julie Swetnick Has ‘Credibility Issues,’” from MSNBC Live with Craig Melvin, featuring Craig Melvin and Kate Snow, aired October 2, 2018, on MSNBC, YouTube video, 2:11, October 2, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1h0m87T7X-s>.

34Jackie Calmes, “Chapter 17,” in *Dissent: The Radicalization of the Republican Party and Its Capture of the Court* (New York: Twelve/Hachette Book Group, 2019), Kindle.

35Jodie Kantor and Megan Twohey, *She Said: Breaking the Sexual Harassment Story That Helped Ignite a Movement* (New York: Penguin Press, 2019), Kindle.

36Ryan Grim, *We’ve Got People: From Jesse Jackson to Alexandria Ocasio-Cortez, the End of Big Money and the Rise of a Movement* (Washington, DC: Strong Arm Press, 2019), Kindle.

37Ryan Lovelace, “Chapter 5,” in *Search and Destroy: Inside the Campaign against Brett Kavanaugh* (Washington, DC: Regnery Publishing, 2019), Kindle.

38Kantor and Twohey, *She Said*.

39Pogrebin and Kelly, *Education of Brett Kavanaugh*.

40Kimberley Strassel (@KimStrassel), “What, you can’t find Keyser? She has lived in the DC area a long time. The paper had no trouble tracking down the other two men (btw, who also denied such party)...,” Twitter, September 22, 2018, 11:47 p.m., <https://twitter.com/KimStrassel/status/1043708356836225024>.

41Gregg Re, “Kavanaugh Accuser’s Details Have Changed, but She Remains Certain about Abuse,” Fox News, September 23, 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com/politics/kavanaugh-accusers-details-have-changed-but-she-remains-certain-about-abuse> (brackets in original).

42Kimberley Strassel (@KimStrassel), “Wow. And CNN reporting that the fourth person, Leland Keyser, is denying memory of knowing Kavanaugh or of this event...,” Twitter, September 22, 2018, 10:02 p.m., <https://twitter.com/kimstrassel/status/1043681863724818432>.

43This and the preceding quotation are both from Pogrebin and Kelly, “Chapter 10,” in *Education of Brett Kavanaugh*.

44Kathleen Parker, “Leland Keyser Is the True Hero of the Kavanaugh Saga,”

Washington Post, September 24, 2019,
https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/leland-keyser-is-the-true-hero-of-the-kavanaugh-saga/2019/09/24/8b12fe9a-df0d-11e9-b199-f638bf2c340f_story.html.

45This and the preceding two quotations are all from Parker, “Leland Keyser Is the True Hero.”

46Pogrebin and Kelly, “Chapter 10,” in *Education of Brett Kavanaugh*.

47“Leland Keyser Should Receive Profile in Courage Award,” *Cape Cod Times*, October 2, 2019,
<https://www.capecodtimes.com/story/opinion/letters/2019/10/02/leland-keyser-should-receive-profile/2637909007>.

48This and the preceding two quotations are all from Parker, “Leland Keyser Is the True Hero.”

49Charles McCarry, *Second Sight: A Paul Christopher Novel* (New York: Penguin Group USA, 1992), 413,
https://books.google.com/books/about/Second_Sight.html?id=D8W0X7wsB2YC.

50Cory Booker, “So Much for Stealing Second,” *The Stanford Daily*, February 19, 1992, 4, *The Stanford Daily Archives*,
<https://archives.stanforddaily.com/1992/02/19?page=4>.

51Booker, “So Much for Stealing Second.”

52NBC News, “GOP Senators Vote Down Richard Blumenthal Measure to Subpoena Mark Judge | NBC News,” from Senate Judiciary Committee confirmation hearing on the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh, aired September 28, 2018, on NBC News, on NBC, YouTube video, 3:25, September 28, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=jhp09qcw23Y>.

53William Cummings, “Kavanaugh Classmate Mark Judge Spotted Hiding Out at Delaware Beach House by Reporter,” USA Today, September 25, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2018/09/25/kavanaugh-classmate-mark-judge-spotted/1418443002>.

54Spencer Kornhaber, “Brett Kavanaugh, Mark Judge, and the Romanticizing of Teenage Indiscretion,” Atlantic, September 19, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/entertainment/archive/2018/09/mark-judge-brett-kavanaugh-writing/570631>.

55William Cummings, “‘Uncontrollable Male Passion’: Writings of Brett Kavanaugh’s Classmate under Scrutiny,” USA Today, September 18, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/onpolitics/2018/09/18/mark-judge-brett-kavanaugh-classmate/1343556002>.

56Mark Judge, “Hard Case Crime: The Beauty of Male Passion,” Splice Today, September 10, 2015, <https://www.splicetoday.com/pop-culture/hard-case-crime-the-beauty-of-male-passion>.

57This and the preceding four quotations are all from Judge, “Hard Case

Crime.”

58“Wash. Post Reporter: Kavanaugh Friend Mark Judge Is the Kind of Person You Might Describe as a Men’s Rights Activist,” Media Matters for America, September 19, 2018, adapted from MSNBC Live with Velshi and Ruhle, featuring Ali Velshi and Stephanie Ruhle, aired September 19, 2018, on MSNBC, <https://www.mediamatters.org/msnbc/wash-post-reporter-kavanaugh-friend-mark-judge-kind-person-you-might-describe-mens-rights>.

59Elizabeth Landers, “Archived Videos Give a View of Brett Kavanaugh’s Friend Mark Judge,” CNN, October 1, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/01/politics/mark-judge-videos>.

60Landers, “Archived Videos Give a View.”

61Landers, “Archived Videos Give a View.”

62Gerard Manley Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur,” written 1877, published 1918, in Poems of Gerard Manley Hopkins, retrieved from “God’s Grandeur,” Gerard Manley Hopkins Official Website, International Hopkins Association, accessed September 14, 2022, <https://hopkinspoetry.com/poem/gods-grandeur>.

63Angela Rye, “Angela Rye Joins CNN Panel with Jake Tapper to Discuss Kavanaugh’s Supreme Court Nomination,” from The Lead with Jake Tapper, featuring Jake Tapper, aired September 18, 2018, on CNN, YouTube video, 13:55, October 2, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=3FFeecT0DCs>.

64Marc Fisher and Perry Stein, “‘100 Kegs or Bust’: Kavanaugh Friend, Mark Judge, Has Spent Years Writing about High School Debauchery,” Washington Post, September 21, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/100-kegs-or-bust-kavanaugh-friend-has-spent-years-writing-about-high-school-debauchery/2018/09/21/a8e0fe22-bb55-11e8-a8aa-860695e7f3fc_story.html (emphasis added).

65Howard Mintz, “Former Talk Show Host Sentenced to More Than Seven Years in Prison,” (San Jose) Mercury News, August 28, 2008, <https://www.mercurynews.com/2008/08/28/former-talk-show-host-sentenced-to-more-than-seven-years-in-prison>.

66Phil Matier and Andy Ross, “Former KGO Host and Child Porn Convict Bernie Ward Recalls Kavanaugh School,” San Francisco Chronicle, September 26, 2018, <https://www.sfchronicle.com/bayarea/matier-ross/article/Former-KGO-host-and-child-porn-convict-Bernie-13259818.php>.

67“The Bad News Bears,” directed by Michael Ritchie, written by Bill Lancaster, featuring Walter Matthau and Tatum O’Neal (Paramount Pictures, 1976), 1:42:00, <https://www.amazon.com/Bad-News-Bears-Michael-Ritchie/dp/B001D0DR88>.

68Paul Sperry, “Suppressed Blasey Ford Yearbooks Reveal Fast Times at Holton-Arms,” RealClearInvestigations, September 27, 2018, https://www.realclearinvestigations.com/articles/2018/09/27/blasey_ford_yearbo

69opsspec1991, “New Witness Against Christine Ford: She Was Not A Victim, She Was A Party Animal, Heavy Drinker & ‘Fast’ ...,” comment, posted October 8, 2018, in forum, “Ford’s HS Yearbooks Brag of Drunken Promiscuity, ‘54 Sex Partners before College,’” created by opsspec1991, September 28, 2018, on USA

Carry, <https://forums.usacarry.com/threads/fords-hs-yearbooks-brag-of-drunken-promiscuity-54-sex-partners-before-college.65401>.

70CHQ Staff, “Researcher Uncovers Christine Blasey Ford’s ‘Hidden’ 80s-Era High School Social Life,” Virginia Star, September 22, 2018, <https://thevirginiastar.com/2018/09/22/researcher-uncovers-christine-blasey-fords-hidden-80s-era-high-school-social-life>.

71CHQ Staff, “Researcher Uncovers Social Life.”

72opsspec1991, “Blasey-Ford’s HS Yearbook Brags of Drunken Promiscuity, ‘54 Sex Partners Before College’...,” comment, posted September 28, 2018, in forum, “Ford’s HS Yearbooks Brag of Drunken Promiscuity, ‘54 Sex Partners before College,”” created by opsspec1991, September 28, 2018, on USA Carry, <https://forums.usacarry.com/threads/fords-hs-yearbooks-brag-of-drunken-promiscuity-54-sex-partners-before-college.65401>.

73CHQ Staff, “Researcher Uncovers Social Life.”

74Timothy Don, “I Went to Georgetown Prep and Knew Mark Judge—and I Believe Christine Blasey Ford,” Nation, October 5, 2018, <https://www.thenation.com/article/archive/i-went-to-georgetown-prep-and-knew-mark-judge-and-i-believe-christine-blasey-ford>.

75This and the preceding eight quotations are all from Don, “I Went to Georgetown Prep.”

76“Stasi,” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, last modified September 7, 2022, <https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Stasi>.

77Alison Lewis, *A State of Secrecy: Stasi Informers and the Culture of Surveillance* (Lincoln, NE: Potomac Books/University of Nebraska Press, 2021), xvi.

78William Peter Blatty, *The Exorcist* (New York: HarperCollins Publishers, 2011).

79Helen Andrews, “Shame Storm,” *First Things*, January 2019, <https://www.firstthings.com/article/2019/01/shame-storm>.

80“Stripes,” directed by Ivan Reitman, written by Len Blum, Dan Goldberg, and Harold Ramis, featuring Bill Murray, Harold Ramis, Warren Oates, P. J. Soles, and John Candy (Columbia Pictures, 1981), 1:46:00, <https://www.amazon.com/Stripes-Theatrical-Bill-Murray/dp/B000SP1SF8>.

81Gabriel Pogrund, Carol D. Leonnig, and Aaron C. Davis, “‘How’d You Find Me?’: Mark Judge Has Been Holed Up in a Beach House in Delaware amid a Media Firestorm,” *Washington Post*, September 24, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/investigations/howd-you-find-me-mark-judge-has-been-holed-up-in-a-beach-house-in-delaware-amid-a-media-firestorm/2018/09/24/9d4829aa-c041-11e8-be77-516336a26305_story.html.

82Dainin Katagiri, “Part One: Life Force & Life,” *The Light that Shines through Infinity: Zen and the Energy of Life* (Boulder, CO: Shambhala, 2017), 3–55, https://books.google.com/books/about/The_Light_That_Shines_Through_Infinity

id=iiw8DwAAQBAJ&source=kp_book_description.

83Description replicated from memory. For a current overview of the school's over-two-hundred-year-old theme, see "Principles of Ignatian Spirituality," Georgetown Preparatory School, <https://www.gprep.org/spiritual-life/principles-of-ignatian-spirituality>.

84This and the preceding quotation are both from William Shakespeare, *Macbeth* (Urbana, IL: Project Gutenberg, 1998), retrieved September 14, 2022, from <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1533>. The first is from act 1, scene 1; the second is from act 1, scene 7.

85Thomas Merton, *No Man Is an Island* (New York: Harcourt, Inc., 1955), Kindle.

86Merton, *No Man Is an Island*.

87Herodotus, "Historiarum Liber Primus," in *Herodoti Historiarum Libri IX* (Urbana, IL: Project Gutenberg, 2018), from Wilhelm Dindorf, *Herodoti Historiarum Libri IX* (Paris: A. Firmin-Didot, 1858), retrieved September 14, 2022, from <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/56842>.

88Aleksandr Solzhenitsyn, "A World Split Apart" (Commencement Address, Harvard University, Cambridge, MA: June 8, 1978), from Online Speech Bank, *American Rhetoric*, last modified February 18, 2012, <https://www.americanrhetoric.com/speeches/alexandersolzhenitsynharvard.htm>.

89Norman Mailer, *Mind of an Outlaw: Selected Essays* (New York: Random House Publishing Group, 2013), 121, <https://books.google.com/books?id=mNvS1LVX7ZQC>.

90Mailer, *Mind of an Outlaw*, 113.

91James Hollis, *Under Satan's Shadow: The Wounding and Healing of Men* (Ontario, Canada: Inner City Books, 1994), Kindle.

92W. Somerset Maugham, *The Razor's Edge* (New York: Vintage International, 2003), Kindle.

93David Browne, "Rolling Stone at 50: Shaping Contrasting Narratives of Woodstock, Altamont," *Rolling Stone*, June 26, 2017, <https://au.rollingstone.com/culture/culture-news/rolling-stone-at-50-shaping-contrasting-narratives-of-woodstock-altamont-1836>.

94"The Rolling Stones Disaster at Altamont: Let It Bleed," *Rolling Stone*, January 21, 2017, <https://www.rollingstone.com/feature/the-rolling-stones-disaster-at-altamont-let-it-bleed-71299>.

95Lester Bangs, "Astral Weeks (1979)," in "Part One: Two Testaments," in *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung: The Work of a Legendary Critic: Rock 'n' Roll as Literature and Literature as Rock 'n' Roll*, ed. Greil Marcus (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), Kindle.

96This and the preceding two quotations are all from Bangs, “Astral Weeks (1979).”

97Lester Bangs, “Of Pop and Pies and Fun: A Program for Mass Liberation in the Form of a Stooges Review, on Who’s the Fool? (1970),” in “Part Two: Blowing It Up,” in *Psychotic Reactions and Carburetor Dung: The Work of a Legendary Critic: Rock ’n’ Roll as Literature and Literature as Rock ’n’ Roll*, ed. Greil Marcus (New York: Anchor Books, 2003), Kindle.

98This and the preceding quotation are both from Bangs, “Astral Weeks (1979).”

99John Paul II to Henri de Lubac, letter, 1968, in Avery Dulles, “John Paul II and the Mystery of the Human Person,” *America* 190, no. 3 (February 2, 2004), <https://www.americamagazine.org/issue/469/article/john-paul-ii-and-mystery-human-person>.

100Jamie Manson, “The Evolution of Ilisa Delio,” *National Catholic Reporter*, July 16, 2014, <https://www.ncronline.org/blogs/grace-margins/evolution-ilia-delio>.

101This and the preceding quotation are both from H. L. Mencken, “Women’s Intelligence,” in *In Defense of Women* (Urbana, IL: Project Gutenberg, 1998), retrieved September 14, 2022, from <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/1270>.

102Simon Reynolds, *Rip It Up and Start Again: Postpunk 1978-1984* (London: Penguin Books, 2006), 2, https://books.google.com/books/about/Rip_it_Up_and_Start_Again.html?id=LlZQpWBFbHcC.

103This and the preceding quotation are both from Reynolds, *Rip It Up*, 2.

104Christopher Lasch, *The Culture of Narcissism: American Life in an Age of Diminishing Expectations* (New York: W. W. Norton, 1979).

105CNBC Television, “Brett Kavanaugh, Christine Blasey Ford Testify before U.S. Senate — Thursday, Sept. 27 2018,” from Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh, aired September 27, 2018, on CNBC, YouTube video, 8:39:51, September 27, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MvaFzCrYcXI>.

106Barry Meier, *Spooked: The Trump Dossier, Black Cube, and the Rise of Private Spies* (New York: Harper, 2021), Kindle.

107Oversight and Review Division 19-02, Office of the Inspector General, US Department of Justice, Report of Investigation of Former Federal Bureau of Investigation Director James Comey’s Disclosure of Sensitive Investigative Information and Handling of Certain Memoranda (August 2019), 4, PDF, <https://oig.justice.gov/reports/2019/o1902.pdf>.

108James Bovard, “You May Have Seen Him on a Prayer Candle, but James Comey Is No Saint,” *USA Today*, August 30, 2019, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/opinion/2019/08/30/james-comey-fbi-memo-leaks-trump-inspector-general-report-column/2157705001>.

109Grim, “Dianne Feinstein Withholding Brett Kavanaugh Document.”

110Grim, “Chapter 8,” in We’ve Got People.

111This and the preceding two quotations are all from Grim, “Chapter 8,” We’ve Got People.

112Eyewitness News, “Senate Committee Vote.”

113Eyewitness News, “Senate Committee Vote.”

114Judith Adkins, “These People Are Frightened to Death,” Prologue 48, no. 2 (Summer 2016),
<https://www.archives.gov/publications/prologue/2016/summer/lavender.html>.

115Lee Edwards, PhD, “A Man of Courage and Faith,” Heritage Foundation, April 6, 2001, <https://www.heritage.org/conservatism/commentary/man-courage-and-faith>.

116This and the preceding quotation are both from Eyewitness News, “Senate Committee Vote.”

117Sam Dorman, “‘Fistfights Nearly Broke Out’ among Senators before Kavanaugh Vote, New Book Claims,” Fox News, July 9, 2019,
<https://www.foxnews.com/politics/fistfights-senators-kavanaugh-vote-book>.

118Mollie Hemingway and Carrie Severino, “Chapter 6,” in *Justice on Trial: The Kavanaugh Confirmation and the Future of the Supreme Court* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2019), Kindle.

119This and the preceding quotation are both from Hemingway and Severino, “Chapter 6,” in *Justice on Trial*.

120This and the preceding quotation are both from Dorman, “Fistfights Nearly Broke Out.”

121This and the preceding quotation are both from Hemingway and Severino, “Chapter 6,” in *Justice on Trial*.

122CNN, “Democrats Walk Out of Senate Judiciary Committee Meeting,” from press interaction after Senate Judiciary Committee hearing on the nomination of Brett Kavanaugh, on September 28, 2018, YouTube video, 13:36, September 28, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=ySYOdvVLMKU&t=339s>.

123This and the preceding three quotations are all from CNN, “Democrats Walk.”

124Eyewitness News, “Senate Committee Vote.”

125This and the preceding quotation are both from CNN, “Tearful Woman

Confronts Senator Flake on Elevator,” YouTube video, 7:23, September 28, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=bshgOZ8QQxU>.

126Eric Bradner, Manu Raju, Phil Mattingly, and Dana Bash, “Trump Orders FBI Probe into Kavanaugh; Senate Vote Delayed,” CNN, September 29, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/28/politics/kavanaugh-senate-judiciary-vote>.

127MSNBC, “Jane Mayer: Brett Kavanaugh Witnesses Can’t Reach the FBI | All In | MSNBC,” from All In with Christ Hayes, featuring Chris Hayes, aired October 1, 2018, on MSNBC, YouTube video, 5:21, October 1, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=hPIxcPYxBMM>.

128Christal Hayes, “Two Men Say They, Not Brett Kavanaugh, Had Alleged Sexual Encounter with Christine Ford,” USA Today, September 26, 2018, <https://www.usatoday.com/story/news/politics/2018/09/26/brett-kavanaugh-two-men-say-they-had-disputed-sexual-encounter-christine-ford/1439569002>.

129Bridgit Mendler (@bridgitmendler), “Dr Christine Blasey Ford, or Aunt Chrissy as I know her is the person who patiently helped me with my college application, she was the first to give me a hug when I saw my family on vacation. Please remember her humanity. This is a message from our family #DearProfessorFord [image attached],” Twitter, September 20, 2018, 11:33 a.m., <https://twitter.com/bridgitmendler/status/1042799032748400640>.

130Mollie Hemingway and Carrie Severino, “Christine Blasey Ford’s Father Supported Brett Kavanaugh’s Confirmation,” Federalist, September 12, 2019, <https://thefederalist.com/2019/09/12/christine-blasey-fords-father-supported-brett-kavanaughs-confirmation>.

131Jessica Contrera and Ian Shapira, “Christine Blasey Ford’s Family Has Been Nearly Silent amid Outpouring of Support,” Washington Post, September 27, 2018, https://www.washingtonpost.com/local/christine-blasey-fords-own-family-has-been-nearly-silent-amid-outpouring-of-support/2018/09/26/49a3f4a6-c0d6-11e8-be77-516336a26305_story.html.

132Hemingway and Severino, “Father Supported Brett.”

133John Solomon and Buck Sexton, “Exclusive: Trump Says Exposing ‘Corrupt’ FBI Probe Could Be ‘Crowning Achievement’ of Presidency,” Hill, September 18, 2018, <https://thehill.com/hilltv/rising/407335-exclusive-trump-says-exposing-corrupt-fbi-probe-could-be-crowning-achievement>.

134Solomon and Sexton, “Exposing ‘Corrupt’ FBI.”

135Oversight and Review Division 19-02, Report of Investigation, 57.

136MSNBC, “Senator GOP Agree to One-Week Delay,” from The 11th Hour with Brian Williams, featuring Brian Williams, aired September 28, 2018, on MSNBC, transcript, September 28, 2018, <https://www.msnbc.com/transcripts/11th-hour-with-brian-williams/2018-09-28-msna1149466>.

137MSNBC, “Senator GOP Agree.”

138Rachel Mitchell, “Analysis of Dr. Christine Blasey Ford’s Allegations,”

memorandum, sent September 30, 2018, to all Republican senators, retrieved from “Rachel Mitchell’s Analysis,” Washington Post, embedded PDF, http://apps.washingtonpost.com/g/documents/politics/rachel-mitchells-analysis/3221/?itid=lk_inline_manual_3.

139CNBC Television, “Brett Kavanaugh, Christine Blasey Ford Testify.”

140Natalie Andrews, Rebecca Ballhaus, and Sadie Gurman, “Friends of Dr. Ford Felt Pressure to Revisit Statement,” Wall Street Journal, October 5, 2018, <https://www.wsj.com/articles/friend-of-dr-ford-felt-pressure-to-revisit-statement-1538715152>.

141Geneva Sands and Josh Campbell, “Friend of Kavanaugh Accuser Disputes Polygraph Controversy,” CNN, October 3, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/10/03/politics/kavanaugh-accuser-polygraph>.

142This and the preceding two quotations are all from Sands and Campbell, “Friend of Kavanaugh Accuser.”

143Andrews, Ballhaus, and Gurman, “Friends of Dr. Ford.”

144Oversight and Review Division 18-04, Office of the Inspector General, US Department of Justice, A Review of Various Actions by the Federal Bureau of Investigation and Department of Justice in Advance of the 2016 Election (June 2018), 404, PDF, <https://www.justice.gov/file/1071991/download>.

145For some examples, see MSNBC, “Details of FBI’s Search of Mar-a-Lago Lead Experts to Suspect National Security Aspect,” from MSNBC Prime, featuring Ali Velshi, aired on MSNBC, YouTube video, 5:55, August 11, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=XZK0WMZY6bM>; and David Laufman (@DavidLaufmanLaw), “New Trump filing doubles down on his scofflaw disregard for protecting classified information, openly mocking whether 100 marked classified documents are truly classified,” Twitter, September 12, 2022, 11:14 a.m., <https://twitter.com/DavidLaufmanLaw/status/1569343636332023812>.

146Geoff Bennett, Hallie Jackson, and Kristen Welker, “Inside the White House: ‘Euphoria and Relief’ as Kavanaugh Poised for Supreme Court,” NBC News, October 5, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/white-house/inside-white-house-euphoria-relief-kavanaugh-poised-supreme-court-n917281>.

147This and the preceding quotation are both from Senator John Kennedy, “Sen. Kennedy Discusses Kavanaugh FBI Investigation on Fox News,” from The Story with Martha MacCallum, featuring Martha MacCallum, aired October 1, 2018, on Fox News Channel, YouTube video, 7:35, October 1, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=btDFSAnDUEo>.

148Michael Avenatti (@MichaelAvenatti), “Yet another accuser has come forward (see sworn stmt below). She is prepared to meet with the FBI today and disclose facts and witnesses [two images attached],” Twitter, October 3, 2018, 7:26 a.m., <https://twitter.com/MichaelAvenatti/status/1047447758993547265>.

149Kate Snow and Anna Schecter, “New Questions Raised about Avenatti Claims Regarding Kavanaugh,” NBC News, October 25, 2018, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/justice-department/new-questions-raised-about-avenatti-claims-regarding-kavanaugh-n924596>.

150Brian Flood, “NBC News Raises Eyebrows by Sitting on Info that Contradicted Michael Avenatti Client’s Gang Rape Claim,” Fox News, October 26, 2018, <https://www.foxnews.com/entertainment/nbc-news-raises-eyebrows-by-sitting-on-info-that-contradicted-michael-avenatti-client>.

151Ariane de Vogue and Eli Watkins, “New Kavanaugh Accuser Has Tie to Firm of Christine Blasey Ford’s Attorney,” CNN, September 26, 2018, <https://www.cnn.com/2018/09/26/politics/julie-swetnick-debra-katz-settlement>.

152NBC News, “Watch Brett Kavanaugh’s Full Speech at Supreme Court Justice Swearing-In Ceremony,” from Supreme Court swearing-in ceremony at the White House, on October 8, 2018, YouTube video, 12:38, October 8, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=MuoA5K11bGY>.

153Mary Margaret Olohan, “Exclusive: Video Shows Anti-Kavanaugh Lawyer Saying Christine Blasey Ford Wanted ‘Asterisk’ by Justice’s Name,” Daily Caller, September 4, 2019, <https://dailycaller.com/2019/09/04/christine-ford-abortion-kavanaugh>.

154Lovelace, Search and Destroy.

155Holmes Lybrand and Tierney Sneed, “FBI Says Man Accused of Attempting to Kill Brett Kavanaugh Said He Was ‘Shooting for 3’ Justices,” CNN, July 27, 2022, <https://www.cnn.com/2022/07/27/politics/kavanaugh-roske-arrest-warrant/index.html>.

156This and the preceding six quotations are all from Lybrand and Sneed, “FBI Says Man Accused.”

157“Virginia Man Sentenced to 25 Years in Prison in Shooting of Security Guard at Family Research Council: Defendant Targeted Organization in Planned Attack,” statement, released by U.S. Attorney’s Office, District of Columbia, on September 19, 2013, retrieved from Washington Field Office, The Federal Bureau of Investigation, <https://archives.fbi.gov/archives/washingtondc/press-releases/2013/virginia-man-sentenced-to-25-years-in-prison-in-shooting-of-security-guard-at-family-research-council>.

158“Gunman Dead after Attacking Congressmen at Virginia Baseball Field,” BBC News, June 15, 2017, <https://www.bbc.com/news/world-us-canada-40275055>.

159Dobbs v. Jackson Women’s Health Organization, 597 U.S. at 5 (2022), https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/21pdf/19-1392_6j37.pdf.

160Dobbs v Jackson, 597 U.S. at 6.

161Meredith Heagney, “Justice Ruth Bader Ginsburg Offers Critique of Roe v. Wade During Law School Visit,” The University of Chicago Law School, May 15, 2013, <https://www.law.uchicago.edu/news/justice-ruth-bader-ginsburg-offers-critique-roe-v-wade-during-law-school-visit>.

162“Howard J. LaFay, Editor at National Geographic,” Washington Post, accessed September 15, 2022, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/local/1980/12/10/howard-j-lafay-editor-at-national-geographic/d6edc0a3-08da-4b89-b168-bb51a10fa1ba>.

163Information on Thomas Abercrombie taken from Margalit Fox, “Thomas J. Abercrombie, 75, Adventurer with Lens, Dies,” New York Times, April 16, 2006, <https://www.nytimes.com/2006/04/16/nyregion/thomas-j-abercrombie-75-adventurer-with-lens-dies.html>.

164Information on Luis Marden taken from Douglas Martin, “Luis Marden, 90, Adventurer and Geographic Journalist,” New York Times, March 5, 2003, <https://www.nytimes.com/2003/03/05/us/luis-marden-90-adventurer-and-geographic-journalist.html>; and “Luis Marden,” Wikipedia, Wikimedia Foundation, last modified August 22, 2022, https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Luis_Marden.

165“Ariana Grande under Investigation for Licking Doughnuts,” Today, July 9, 2015, <https://www.today.com/video/ariana-grande-under-investigation-for-licking-doughnuts-480896067927>.

166Robert Bly, *Iron John: A Book about Men* (Boston: Da Capo Press, 2015), Kindle.

167“Risky Business,” directed and written by Paul Brickman, featuring Tom Cruise and Rebecca De Mornay (The Geffen Film Company, 1983), 1:39:00, <https://www.amazon.com/Risky-Business-Tom-Cruise/dp/B000SW16M6>.

168Ginia Bellafante, “‘Risky Business’ and Brett Kavanaugh, 35 Years Later,” New York Times, September 27, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/09/27/nyregion/brett-kavanaugh-high-school-drinking-assault.html>.

169 Jake Malooley, “‘Risky Business’ Director: ‘Some People Like the Visibility. I Don’t,’” Salon, September 2, 2013,
https://www.salon.com/2013/09/02/risky_business_director_some_people_like_tl

170 Dana Harris, “At 20, ‘Risky’ Is Still Frisky,” Variety, June 19, 2001,
<https://variety.com/2001/film/news/at-20-risky-is-still-frisky-1117801630>.

171 “Fast Times at Ridgemont High (The Criterion Collection),” directed by Amy Heckerling, written by Cameron Crowe, featuring Sean Penn, Jennifer Jason Leigh, Judge Reinhold, Robert Romanus, Brian Backer, Phoebe Cates, and Ray Walston (Criterion Collection, 2021), 1:29:00, originally released 1982, by Universal Pictures.

172 “Fast Times at Ridgemont High (The Criterion Collection).”

173 Chris Chase, “At the Movies; Jennifer Leigh and Her Trip from X to R,” New York Times, September 3, 1982, 6, retrieved from
<https://www.nytimes.com/1982/09/03/movies/at-the-movies-jennifer-leigh-and-her-trip-from-x-to-r.html>.

174 Chris Chase, “The Oral History of John Riggins’ Boozy Night with a Supreme Court Justice,” For The Win - USA Today, July 11, 2013,
<https://ftw.usatoday.com/2013/07/john-riggins-sandra-day-oconnor-loosen-up>.

175 Chase, “Oral History.”

176Image of article: Dan Steinberg, “John Riggins and ‘Loosen Up, Sandy,’” Washington Post, October 29, 2012, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/dc-sports-bog/wp/2012/10/29/john-riggins-and-loosen-up-sandy>. Text of article: Elizabeth Kastor, “John Riggins’ Big Sleep,” Washington Post, February 1, 1985, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1985/02/01/john-riggins-big-sleep/0592b41e-3edc-4e2a-9b1a-6e26a116a750>.

177The Texas Tribune, “The Kavanaugh Download,” from Texas Tribune Festival, September 27–29, 2018, in Austin, Texas, Vimeo, 1:01:02, September 29, 2018, <https://livestream.com/texastribune/events/8379189>.

178“Hitchens Affidavit on Blumenthal,” Washington Post, February 6, 1999, retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/clinton/stories/hitchenstext020699.htm>.

179Lloyd Grove, “A Parting of Ways: Hitchens and Blumenthal,” Washington Post, February 8, 1999, C1, retrieved from <https://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-srv/politics/special/clinton/stories/hitchens020899.htm>.

180Christopher Hitchens, “I’ll Never Eat Lunch in This Town Again,” Vanity Fair, May 1999, 72, republished online, May 19, 2014, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/1999/05/christopher-hitchens-testifies-monica-lewinsky>.

181Hitchens, “I’ll Never Eat Lunch.”

182“The Mark Judge We Knew,” Progressive Magazine, October 4, 2018, <https://progressive.org/latest/the-mark-judge-we-knew-181004>.

183This reference and the preceding quotation are both from “The Mark Judge We Knew.”

184Julian Mazor, “The Boy Who Used Foul Language,” *New Yorker*, March 30, 1968, 30–31, retrieved from <https://www.newyorker.com/magazine/1968/03/30/the-boy-who-used-foul-language>.

185Ben Smith, “Is Ronan Farrow Too Good to Be True?,” *New York Times*, May 17, 2020, <https://www.nytimes.com/2020/05/17/business/media/ronan-farrow.html>.

186This and the preceding quotation are both from Smith, “Ronan Farrow.”

187Ronan Farrow, “Missing Files Motivated the Leak of Michael Cohen’s Financial Records,” *New Yorker*, May 16, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/missing-files-motivated-the-leak-of-michael-cohens-financial-records>.

188MSNBC, “Amid Report’s Revelations: An Informant in the Donald Trump Russia Probe | Rachel Maddow | MSNBC,” from *The Rachel Maddow Show*, featuring Rachel Maddow, aired May 16, 2018, on MSNBC, YouTube, 21:29, May 17, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=Q-YjxvbGFOQ>.

189This and the preceding five quotations are all from Smith, “Ronan Farrow.”

190Joe Brown, “Hayes Award to ‘Crucible,’” Washington Post, May 10, 1988, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/archive/lifestyle/1988/05/10/hayes-award-to-crucible/d0d34843-ae0e-4bcd-a69a-4d4949da1dc1>.

191Ben W. Gilbert, *Ten Blocks from the White House: An Anatomy of the Washington Riots of 1968* (Westport, CT: Praeger Publishers, 1968).

192The information and quotations in this and the preceding three paragraphs are all from Gilbert, *Ten Blocks*.

193The information in this paragraph and the preceding four quotations are all from Gilbert, *Ten Blocks*.

194F. Scott Fitzgerald, “Chapter 9,” *The Great Gatsby* (Urbana, IL: Project Gutenberg, 2021), retrieved September 14, 2022, from <https://www.gutenberg.org/ebooks/64317>.

195This and the preceding seven quotations are all from Bly, *Iron John*.

196This and the preceding quotation are both from Cindy Boren, “Richard Sherman Goes on Postgame Rant with Erin Andrews (video),” Washington Post, January 19, 2014, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/early-lead/wp/2014/01/19/richard-sherman-goes-on-postgame-rant-with-erin-andrews-video>.

197This and the preceding two quotations are all from Boren, “Postgame Rant.”

198Bly, Iron John.

199Bly, Iron John.

200“All the President’s Men,” directed by Alan J. Pakula, written by William Goldman, featuring Dustin Hoffman and Robert Redford (Wildwood Enterprises, 1976), 2:18:00.

201“Shattered Glass,” directed and written by Billy Ray, featuring Hayden Christensen (Cruise/Wagner Productions, 2003), 1:34:00.

202Stephen Glass, “Spring Breakdown,” New Republic, March 31, 1997, 18, retrieved from <https://wp.lps.org/akabour/files/2013/12/Spring-Breakdown-Stephen-Glass.pdf>.

203See “To Our Readers: A Report,” New Republic, June 29, 1998, <http://web.archive.org/web/20000902205444/www.tnr.com/archive/0698/062998>.

204Leonard Downie Jr, All About the Story: News, Power, Politics, and the Washington Post (New York: Public Affairs, 2020), Kindle.

205This and the preceding quotation are both from Downie, All About the Story.

206 Jay Rosen, "Donald Trump Is Crashing the System. Journalists Need to Build a New One," Washington Post, July 13, 2016, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/in-theory/wp/2016/07/13/donald-trump-is-crashing-the-system-journalists-need-to-build-a-new-one>.

207 Andrew C. McCarthy, "Not Treason, Not a Crime—but Definitely a Gross Abuse of Power," Hill, October 8, 2020, <https://thehill.com/opinion/white-house/520153-not-treason-not-a-crime-but-definitely-a-gross-abuse-of-power>.

208 Josh Rogin, "Trump Campaign Guts GOP's Anti-Russia Stance on Ukraine," Washington Post, July 18, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/opinions/global-opinions/trump-campaign-guts-gops-anti-russia-stance-on-ukraine/2016/07/18/98adb3b0-4cf3-11e6-a7d8-13d06b37f256_story.html.

209 Bryon York, *Obsession: Inside the Washington Establishment's Never-Ending War on Trump* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 2020), Kindle.

210 Juliet Eilperin and Adam Entous, "Russian Operation Hacked a Vermont Utility, Showing Risk to U.S. Electrical Grid Security, Officials Say," Washington Post, December 31, 2016, https://www.washingtonpost.com/world/national-security/russian-hackers-penetrated-us-electricity-grid-through-a-utility-in-vermont/2016/12/30/8fc90cc4-ceec-11e6-b8a2-8c2a61b0436f_story.html.

211 C. D. B. Bryan, *Friendly Fire* (London: Penguin Adult HC/TR, 1976).

212Susan Goldberg, “For Decades, Our Coverage Was Racist. To Rise Above Our Past, We Must Acknowledge It,” *National Geographic: The Race Issue* (April 2018), <https://www.nationalgeographic.co.uk/2018/03/decades-our-coverage-was-racist-rise-above-our-past-we-must-acknowledge-it>.

213Kainaz Amaria, “National Geographic’s November Cover Falls Back on Racist Cliché,” *Vox*, November 1, 2018, <https://www.vox.com/identities/2018/11/1/18036682/national-geographic-november-cover-racist-cowboy-indian-cliche>.

214Diane Johnson, “True Patriots,” *New York Review of Books*, August 5, 1976, retrieved from <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1976/08/05/true-patriots>.

215C. D. B. Byran, “Friendly Fire,” *New York Review of Books*, October 14, 1976, retrieved from <https://www.nybooks.com/articles/1976/10/14/friendly-fire> (in response to “True Patriots”).

216Bryan, “Friendly Fire.”

217Patricia Edmonds, “Helping Families Talk about Gender,” in *A Discussion Guide for Teachers and Parents*, prepared by National Geographic, for *Gender Revolution* (January 2017), <https://www.nationalgeographic.com/pdf/gender-revolution-guide.pdf>.

218Andrew T. Walker and Denny Burk, “National Geographic’s ‘Gender Revolution’: Bad Argument and Biased Ideology,” *Public Discourse*, January 6, 2017, <https://www.thepublicdiscourse.com/2017/01/18491>.

219This and the preceding two quotations are all from Walker and Burk, “National Geographic’s ‘Gender Revolution.’”

220National Press Club Live, “Speaker of the House Paul Ryan Speaks at the National Press Club,” from speech “How Americans Are ‘Better Off Now’” and questions from the press, National Press Club Newsmaker event, on October 8, 2018, YouTube video, 43:51, October 8, 2018, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=l-StBuKiwfg>.

221Jordan B. Peterson, “Rule 11: Do not bother children when they are skateboarding,” in *12 Rules for Life: An Antidote to Chaos* (Toronto, Canada: Random House Canada, 2018), 290.

222Mark Judge, “Skateboarding with Jordan Peterson—and Nietzsche,” *Modern Age*, April 27, 2020, <https://isi.org/modern-age/skateboarding-with-jordan-peterson-and-nietzsche>.

223Sonic Mike, “Zen Skateboarding: Riding into Enlightenment,” *Buddha Weekly*, accessed September 14, 2022, <https://buddhaweekly.com/zen-skateboarding-riding-into-enlightenment>.

224“Jon Kabat-Zinn: Defining Mindfulness,” *Mindful*, January 11, 2017, <https://www.mindful.org/jon-kabat-zinn-defining-mindfulness>.

225Pema Chödrön, *How to Meditate: A Practical Guide to Making Friends with Your Mind* (Boulder, CO: Sounds True, 2013), excerpted in Pema Chödrön, “5

Reasons to Meditate,” Lion’s Roar, September 16, 2022,
<https://www.lionsroar.com/5-reasons-to-meditate-september-2013>.

226Hopkins, “God’s Grandeur.”

227Charles Stone, Holy Noticing: The Bible, Your Brain, and the Mindful Space between Moments (Chicago: Moody Publishers, 2019), Kindle.

228Stone, Holy Noticing.

229Katherine Thompson, Christ-Centred Mindfulness: Connecting to Self and God (Sydney, Australia: Acorn Press, 2018), Kindle.

230Merton, No Man Is an Island.

231Amy G. Oden, Right Here Right Now: The Practice of Christian Mindfulness (Nashville, TN: Abingdon Press, 2017), xi.

232Bessel van der Kolk, MD, The Body Keeps the Score: Brain, Mind, and Body in the Healing of Trauma (New York: Penguin Books, 2015), Kindle.

233Van der Kolk, Body Keeps the Score.

234Bessel van der Kolk, “Bessel van der Kolk: Trauma, the Body, and 2021,” interview by Krista Tippett, on November 11, 2021, On Being with Krista Tippett, podcast, MP3 audio, 50:54, <https://onbeing.org/programs/bessel-van-der-kolk-trauma-the-body-and-2021>.

235Mark Judge, “Army Chaplain and ‘No Greater Love’ Director Justin Roberts: ‘Behind Every Act of Valor Is a Selfless Love,’” MRCTV (blog), April 30, 2018, <https://www.mrctv.org/blog/army-chaplain-and-no-greater-love-director-justin-roberts-behind-every-act-valor-selfless-love>.

236Kyle Beachy, *The Most Fun Thing: Dispatches from a Skateboard Life* (New York: Grand Central Publishing, 2021), Kindle.

237This and the preceding two quotations are all from Beachy, *Most Fun Thing*.

238George Weigel, “A Mission of Love,” George Weigel, March 18, 2015, originally published on *The Catholic Difference*, <https://www.georgeweigel.com/a-mission-of-love>.

239This and the preceding quotation are both from Beachy, *Most Fun Thing*.

240This and the preceding quotation are both from Beachy, *Most Fun Thing*.

241Evgenia Peretz, “‘Men for Others, My Ass’: After Kavanaugh, inside Georgetown Prep’s Culture of Omertà,” *Vanity Fair*, December 17, 2018, <https://www.vanityfair.com/news/2018/12/inside-georgetown-prep-culture-of->

omerta-scandal.

242Peretz, “Men for Others.”

243This and the preceding six quotations are all from Peretz, “Men for Others.”

244Ashe Schow, “Here’s Everything That’s Wrong with the Vanity Fair Hit Job on Brett Kavanaugh’s Alma Mater,” Daily Wire, December 22, 2018, <https://www.dailywire.com/news/heres-everything-thats-wrong-vanity-fair-hit-job-ashe-schow>.

245Schow, “Vanity Fair Hit Job.”

246Schow, “Vanity Fair Hit Job.”

247Peretz, “Men for Others.”

248Calmes, “Chapter 17,” in Dissent.

249Calmes, “Chapter 17,” in Dissent.

250This and the preceding quotation are both from Calmes, “Chapter 17,” in Dissent.

251Nelson, “A Writer Mined.”

252Calmes, “Chapter 17,” in Dissent.

253Dwight Garner, “What a Book Critic Finds in Mark Judge’s ‘Wasted’ 21 Years Later,” New York Times, October 2, 2018, <https://www.nytimes.com/2018/10/02/books/wasted-mark-judge-memoir.html>.

254“NBC News Exclusive: Julie Swetnick Speaks about Alleged Behavior by Judge Kavanaugh,” NBC News, October 1, 2018, video, <https://www.msnbc.com/msnbc/watch/julie-swetnick-speaks-about-alleged-behavior-by-judge-kavanaugh-1334265923929>.

255The quotations in this paragraph and the preceding five paragraphs are all from “NBC News Exclusive: Julie Swetnick.”

256Calmes, “Chapter 17,” in Dissent.

257The quotations in this and the preceding paragraph are all from Texas Tribune, “Kavanaugh Download.”

258Texas Tribune, “Kavanaugh Download.”

259Natalie Zarrelli, “The Worst Freelance Gig in History Was Being the Village Sin Eater,” *Gastro Obscura*, in *Atlas Obscura*, July 14, 2017, originally published November 22, 2016, <https://www.atlasobscura.com/articles/the-worst-paid-freelance-gig-in-history-was-being-the-village-sin-eater>.

260“Michael Avenatti Sentenced to 48 Months in Prison for Identity Theft and Defrauding a Former Client,” statement, released by Southern District of New York, US Attorney’s Office, Department of Justice, on June 2, 2022, retrieved from United States Department of Justice, <https://www.justice.gov/usao-sdny/pr/michael-avenatti-sentenced-48-months-prison-identity-theft-and-defrauding-former-client>.

261Jemele Hill, “What the Black Men Who Identify with Brett Kavanaugh Are Missing,” *Atlantic*, October 12, 2018, <https://www.theatlantic.com/ideas/archive/2018/10/why-black-men-relate-brett-kavanaugh/572776>.

262This and the preceding quotation are both from Hill, “What the Black Men Are Missing.”

263Ashley Powers, “A 10-Year Nightmare over Rape Conviction Is Over,” *Los Angeles Times*, May 25, 2012, <https://www.latimes.com/local/la-xpm-2012-may-25-la-me-rape-dismiss-20120525-story.html>.

264Ronan Farrow and Jane Mayer, “Senate Democrats Investigate a New Allegation of Sexual Misconduct, from Brett Kavanaugh’s College Years,” *New Yorker*, September 23, 2018, <https://www.newyorker.com/news/news-desk/senate-democrats-investigate-a-new-allegation-of-sexual-misconduct-from-the-supreme-court-nominee-brett-kavanaughs-college-years-deborah-ramirez>.

265Matt Taibbi, “Preface: A Utopia of Division,” in *Hate, Inc.: Why Today’s Media Makes Us Despise One Another* (New York: OR Books, 2021), Kindle.

266Ana Marie Cox (take care of yourself) (@anamariecox), Twitter, September 18, 2018, 9:38 a.m.,
<https://twitter.com/anamariecox/status/1042045321570910211>.

267In order of appearance: Mlong (@mlong5000), Twitter, September 18, 2018, 9:45 a.m., <https://twitter.com/mlong5000/status/1042046927053967368>; Goldens Rule (@jamesbranch3), Twitter, September 18, 2018, 9:45 a.m., <https://twitter.com/jamesbranch3/status/1042046960138706944>; Wittorical (@Wittorical), Twitter, September 18, 2018, 9:45 a.m., <https://twitter.com/Wittorical/status/1042046973526913025> (ellipses in original).

268Mollie Hemingway (Mollie) (@MZHemingway), “So I’m reading the new anti-Kavanaugh book by shockingly (really) biased reporters at NYT. All claimed anonymous sources are anti-Kavanaugh while all but a tiny few on-record sources are downright effusive....,” Twitter, thread (fourteen tweets), September 14, 2019, 11:58 p.m. to September 15, 2019, 4:55 p.m., <https://twitter.com/MZHemingway/status/1173083603460329472>.

269Hanna Rosin, “‘The Education of Brett Kavanaugh’ Takes a Hard Look at the Supreme Court Justice and His Accusers,” *New York Times*, September 14, 2019, excerpted from Robin Pogrebin and Kate Kelly, *The Education of Brett Kavanaugh: An Investigation* (New York: Portfolio/Penguin, 2019), <https://www.nytimes.com/2019/09/14/books/review/the-education-of-brett-kavanaugh-robin-pogrebin-kate-kelly.html>.

270Olohan, “Exclusive: Video Shows Anti-Kavanaugh Lawyer.”

271Mollie Hemingway, “New York Times Kavanaugh Reporter Told Source What to Say,” *Federalist*, September 20, 2019, <https://thefederalist.com/2019/09/20/new-york-times-kavanaugh-reporter-told-source-what-to-say>.

272Hemingway, “Kavanaugh Reporter Told Source.”

273Dahlia Lithwick, “Introduction,” in *Lady Justice: Women, the Law, and the Battle to Save America* (New York: Penguin Press, 2022), Kindle.

274Dahlia Lithwick, “Why I Haven’t Gone Back to SCOTUS since Kavanaugh,” *Slate*, October 30, 2019, <https://slate.com/news-and-politics/2019/10/year-after-kavanaugh-cant-go-back-to-scotus.html>.

275Lithwick, “Why I Haven’t Gone Back.”

276Politics and Prose, “Dahlia Lithwick — Lady Justice - with Michele Goodwin,” Dahlia Lithwick’s *Lady Justice* book launch, at Politics and Prose Bookstore, YouTube video, 1:00:27, September 26, 2022, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=QpmzWIPLMV4>.

277Jodie Kantor and Michael Gold, “Roberta Kaplan, Who Aided Cuomo, Resigns from Time’s Up,” *New York Times*, August 9, 2021, <https://www.nytimes.com/2021/08/09/nyregion/roberta-kaplan-times-up->

cuomo.html.

278Kantor and Gold, “Roberta Kaplan.”

279Dartunorro Clark, “Al Franken Accused of Forcibly Kissing, Groping Leann Tweeden,” NBC News, November 16, 2017, <https://www.nbcnews.com/politics/congress/sen-al-franken-accused-forcibly-kissing-groping-woman-n821381>.

280Al Franken, “Author Jackie Calmes Did the Investigation on Brett Kavanaugh the FBI Should Have Done,” interview of Jackie Calmes by Al Franken on The Al Franken Podcast, YouTube video, 48:37, October 10, 2021, <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=4cPtXx3UBbk>, 33:05.

281“The Last Duel,” directed by Ridley Scott, written by Nicole Holofcener, Ben Affleck, and Matt Damon, featuring Matt Damon, Adam Driver, Jodie Comer, and Ben Affleck (20th Century Studios, 2021), 2:32:00, <https://www.amazon.com/Last-Duel-Matt-Damon/dp/B09MMP5KCV>.

282Ali Benjamin, *The Smash-Up: A Novel* (New York: Random House, 2021), Kindle.

283Benjamin, *The Smash-Up*, publisher’s description, retrieved from <https://www.penguinrandomhouse.com/books/646639/the-smash-up-by-ali-benjamin>.

284 Benjamin, *The Smash-Up*.

285 This and the preceding two quotations are both from Benjamin, *The Smash-Up*.

286 Hayley Krischer, *Something Happened to Ali Greenleaf* (New York: Razorbill, 2020).

287 Kate Reed Petty, *True Story: A Novel* (New York: Penguin Books, 2021).

288 Aggie Blum Thompson, *All the Dirty Secrets* (New York: Forge, 2022).

289 Anonymous, “I, [redacted], am a current resident of [redacted], California,” letter, October 2, 2018, posted by Shannon Bream (@ShannonBream), on Twitter, October 2, 2018, 9:12 p.m., <https://twitter.com/ShannonBream/status/1047293294567456770>, quoted in Mairead McArdle, “Ford’s Ex-Boyfriend Contradicts Her on Polygraph,” *National Review*, October 2, 2018, <https://www.nationalreview.com/news/christine-blasey-ford-polygraph-testimony-ex-boyfriend-contradicts>.

290 Julie Grossman, *The Femme Fatale* (New Jersey: Rutgers University Press, 2020), publisher’s description, retrieved from <https://www.rutgersuniversitypress.org/the-femme-fatale/9780813598246>.

291 Grossman, *The Femme Fatale*, publisher’s description.

292Bilge Ebiri, “Duvivier’s Masterwork ‘Panique’ Pits the Crowd against an Innocent,” Village Voice, January 18, 2017, <https://www.villagevoice.com/2017/01/18/duviviers-masterwork-panique-pits-the-crowd-against-an-innocent>.

293James Quandt, “Panic Attack,” essay, in booklet, “Criterion Collection: Panique,” directed and written by Julien Duvivier, featuring Michel Simon, Viviane Romance, and Paul Bernard (Criterion Collection, 2018), 1:38:00, originally released 1946, by Les Acacias, DVD; also found online in James Quandt, “Panique: Panic Attack,” Criterion Collection, December 8, 2018, <https://www.criterion.com/current/posts/6107-panique-panic-attack>.

294Jacques Kelly, “The Rev. Gregory C. Harley, 56, Jesuit Chaplain at Loyola College,” Baltimore Sun, January 29, 2005, <https://www.baltimoresun.com/news/bs-xpm-2005-01-29-0501290162-story.html>.

295Kelly, “Rev. Gregory C. Hartley.”

296Daniel Wattenberg, “Was Punk Rock Right-Wing?,” Washington Examiner, August 25, 1996, <https://www.washingtonexaminer.com/weekly-standard/was-punk-rock-right-wing>.

297Johnny Ramone, interview with the Washington Post, quoted in Joe Taysom, “Johnny Ramone Once Created a List of His 10 Favourite Republican Party Politicians,” Far Out (London), September 15, 2020, <https://faroutmagazine.co.uk/the-ramones-johnny-ramone-favourite-republican-politicians>.

298Ed Power, “‘The Brits Are a Funny Bunch’ - Tony Hadley Talks Brexit and His Spandau Ballet Exit,” Irish Examiner (Cork, Ireland), December 2, 2019, <https://www.irishexaminer.com/lifestyle/arid-30967942.html>.

299This and the preceding quotation are both from Chris Richards, “The 5 Hardest Questions in Pop Music,” Washington Post, July 2, 2018, <https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/style/wp/2018/07/02/feature/separate-art-from-artist-cultural-appropriation>.

300Patrick J. Buchanan, *Right from the Beginning* (Boston: Little Brown & Co., 1988).

ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

■

This book was made possible by Adam Bellow, my sister Alyson, readers of Instapundit and Glenn Reynolds, and the Georgetown Prep Class of 1983.

ABOUT THE AUTHOR

■

Mark Judge is an award-winning journalist whose work has appeared in the Wall Street Journal, American Greatness, the New Criterion, the Stream, the Washington Post, the New York Times, National Review, Law & Liberty, Modern Age, and Splice Today. A co-founder of the Unknown Hoya, Mr. Judge is the author of several books, including God and Man at Georgetown Prep, Damn Senators, and A Tremor of Bliss. He spends his free time skateboarding in America.